ALIENATION, COMMITMENT AND TRANSCENDENCE IN THREE NOVELS OF SAUL BELLOW

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The central point of this thesis is the theme of modern man's alienation from his surroundings as portrayed by Saul Bellow in three of his novels, Dangling Man, Henderson the Rain King and Humboldt's Gift. The individual is seen in Dangling Man as alienated from society, in Henderson the Rain King from nature, and in Humboldt's Gift from the spiritual reality. The relevance of Owen Barfield's thesis in his book Save the Appearances to Bellow's Henderson the Rain King is shown here to be important for our understanding of Bellow's concern with modern man's alienation. My thesis also shows Bellow's faith in man's capacity to solve his dilemma into which "civilization" with its emphasis on the scientific view of the phenomena has put him. Bellow's hero is determined to make a conscious commitment with society and nature that surround him. Only such commitment will give his life a meaning and purpose. But for Bellow this is not enough. My thesis shows how Bellow's hero in his latest novel, Humboldt's Gift, is in search of spiritual reality and how he decides to transcend his involvement with this world in order to relate with the world of soul. The anthroposophist Rudolph Steiner is seen as an influence upon Bellow in respect to his latest protagonist's search for the spiritual reality.

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INTRODUCTION

Most twentieth-century novels of social realism and naturalism depict man suffering because of the seemingly insurmountable, ugly and blind forces of society or nature with which he is in conflict and which defeat him. The world of Saul Bellow's fiction also depicts these forces working against the individual in full measure, and his protagonists also have a hard time dealing with them. But the distinctive character of his novels is that their protagonists, most of them at any rate, suffer not because they are defeated by the outward natural or social forces, but because they do not relate with these forces, because they have a tendency to turn their back upon them, because, in short, they are alienated from them. Most of Bellow's heroes are intellectuals not easily yielding to the necessity of action. They are, according to J. C. Levenson, "the inward and self-fastened"[1] men. They are self-appointed philosophers and teachers who not only analyze the ills of the world around them but who habitually look into themselves, often enjoying the luxury of self-criticism and self-condemnation, but who hesitate to act. They are made like Hamlet, and they suffer like him. They are characters whom Hemingway would cite as examples of what happens to a person when he substitutes reflection for action and struggle.

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[1] J. C. Levenson, "Bellow's Dangling Men," Studies in Modern Fiction, 3, No. 3 (1960), 7.

However intense and wide Bellow's concern may be with the deplorable state of affairs of society at large, with its materialism and secularism, his novels, I believe, are only indirectly dealing with it. Their main concern, in my opinion, is with the individual and his alienation from society, nature and the spiritual realm. Also linked with the problem of alienation is Bellow's anxiety to find, or at least to suggest, an answer for the individual's dilemma in what appears to the individual a very hostile world.

R. Shulman points out that in Bellow's fiction the outside world is weakly rendered and seen through his hero's mind. But he considers it a weakness of Bellow. He writes: "Bellow's difficulties as well as triumphs reflect not only on his personal problem with dialogue but also on the general problem, particularly acute in recent literature, of getting outside the mind and rendering a solid, external world. . . ."[2] What Shulman fails to realize is that Bellow purposely reveals the world through his hero's mind because to do so is necessary for his major theme of the individual's alienation from the external phenomena and its solution through a change in man's own thought.

Bellow's critics have noted in his work both a scathing criticism of the deterioration of moral and spiritual values of modern society caused mainly by its blind pursuit of materialism, and at the same time, an element of approval of life and a clear expression of hope for mankind. S. Baker thinks that the most distinctive feature of

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[2]R. Shulman, "The Style of Bellow's Comedy," PMLA, 83, No. 1 (March 1968), 111.

Bellow's work is his eagerness to find answers for man living in a faithless age:

> The measure of Bellow's work is not simply that he dramatizes the dilemma of a faithless age that needs a faith, and not that he makes art out of it--though he does both exceedingly well--but that, more than any other modern novelist, I believe, he is trying to work out some answer.[3]

Baker calls it the "chivalric quest" of Bellow's protagonists.

Bellow himself, more than once, has emphasized that all is not dead yet, and that man has the capacity to find answers to his problems, to regenerate and live a happy life. In fact, Bellow has complained that twentieth-century novelists have not done their duty in merely dwelling upon the forces against an individual of this era. They should have strongly pointed out man's capacity to face and fight these forces successfully. Novelists, he writes, "must value human existence or be unfaithful to their calling."[4] Regretting that the nineteenth-century romantic view of the individual has been replaced by the twentieth-century view of the dominance of public life over private life, Bellow calls for a re-awakening of the individual self. "Undeniably," he writes, "the human being is not what he commonly thought a century ago. The question nevertheless remains. He is something. What is he? And this question, it seems to me, modern writers have answered very poorly."[5]

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[3]S. Baker, "Saul Bellow's Bout with Chivalry," Criticism, 9 (1967), 111.

[4]Saul Bellow, Recent American Fiction (Washington: The Library of Congress, 1963), p. 12.

[5]Ibid.

Alienation is the main problem of Bellow's heroes. They are all struggling to get along with their surroundings which appear not only ugly, but, more importantly, meaningless. They feel entirely cut off from them. Seeking freedom and happiness away from them, they only find loneliness, restlessness, and frustration. Ultimately they come to realize that real freedom is not in escape from their surroundings but in a commitment to them. To find this commitment they must change their approach to the world they inhabit; however harsh and ugly they may find it, they must live in it. They must belong.

In the following study of three of Bellow's novels, I intend to show that the author, in these novels, presents an individual's attempts to solve his problem of alienation. Through a conscious effort the individual has to break out of the self-imprisoning temperament in order to relate with society, nature and the spiritual world. The three novels are Dangling Man (1944), Henderson the Rain King (1959) and, most recently, Humboldt's Gift (1975). My thesis deals with the hero as an individual in each of these three novels from the point of view of how each suffers because of his peculiar alienation, and ultimately how he triumphs over his alienation through a conscious effort. I have no intention to discuss the inter-relation of these three protagonists. I have chosen them because the main problem for each is his alienation and because signs of their regeneration come as a result of their conscious effort.

In each of the three novels, Bellow concentrates on his protagonist's relationship with either society or nature or the spiritual world. In Dangling Man, the hero is struggling to find his balance

with society, with people around him. In Henderson the Rain King, the hero's restlessness is mainly due to his inability to relate with nature. To the hero of Humboldt's Gift, the most important question that needs to be answered is the question of mortality and immortality. He has been doing well and can continue to do well in the world, but he has come to realize the insignificance, the transient nature of human life on earth. He therefore decides to restrict his involvement with society in order to concentrate on his quest for eternity and immortality.

In Bellow's first novel, Dangling Man, the problem of alienation is comparatively simpler. The fact, however, that in his later novels Bellow continues to be concerned with the problem of alienation shows how important his first novel is in our understanding of the author's work.

The novel which forms the central position of my thesis is Henderson the Rain King. Here Bellow expresses his affirmative view of life most strongly and without qualification or reservation. The author has left the reader in no doubt about the seriousness of the problem as well as its conscious cure by the individual. Commenting upon Bellow's eagerness to suggest cures and alternatives to alienation, D. W. Markos writes: "In all of his novels, Bellow has imagined, with increasing fulness, conditions and images that are alternatives to what he has called 'the wasteland outlook.' In Henderson the Rain King (1959), the alternative is most powerfully imagined, and we can see both the earlier modernist version of man's alienation and the

tentative offering of a new attitude toward the world and man's conception of himself. . . ."[6]

If Bellow is continuing to write on the problem after this, it is because he refuses to put limits on man's imaginative strength and capacity to experience life. To relate to society is essential, as it is to relate to nature. But that should not be the limit or the end. One must go beyond. Going beyond does not involve rejection of society or visible nature. The purpose is to transcend it for a view and consciousness of the eternal. Ihab Hassan writes that the movement in Bellow's heroes from one novel to the next is "toward a resolution of the conflict between self and the world; the movement is from acid defeat to acceptance, and from acceptance to celebration."[7] This was written before the appearance of Humboldt's Gift. In this latest novel, we see Bellow's hero going further than acceptance and celebration of the world around him. He transcends it in order to quest for still deeper mysteries of life after death, of spirit behind appearances. It is a still further step in getting rid of his alienation. Man, to be happy and content, must not allow himself to be bound by selfishness or self-centeredness in this world. This world is not the end. There is a beyond which we must deliver, to which we must try to relate.

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[6]D. W. Markos, "Life Against Death in Henderson the Rain King," Modern Fiction Studies, 17(1971), 194.

[7]Ihab H. Hassan, "Saul Bellow: Five Faces of a Hero," Critique, 3, No. 3(1960), 36.

CHAPTER ONE

I

The very first novel of Bellow hints at most of the human problems he would continue to deal with in his later novels. These problems arise primarily from the individual's confrontation with the society he lives in, with the phenomena of nature that surrounds him, and with death. An awareness of the need for freedom, and a fear of death and mortality, alienate man from his society and put doubts in his mind about the significance of life. Bellow's typical hero, usually a peculiar combination of intellect on the one hand and strong sensitivity on the other, dangles and despises till the weight of self-oppression becomes unbearable. Then, he either breaks down, like Tommy of Seize the Day, to experience "the consummation of his heart's ultimate need,"[1] or like Joseph of Dangling Man and Henderson of Henderson the Rain King, he takes the first step towards a life of hope and contentment by the simple act of surrender, of release from the Self. This step is taken in response to the anxious, long-suppressed cry of the inner voice in them that asks for a change in the very principle of life. In Dangling Man, the protagonist, Joseph, suffering from loneliness and a feeling of rejection by relatives and friends, dangling while waiting to be inducted into the army, ultimately, at the

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[1]Saul Bellow, Seize the Day (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 118.

end of the book, joins the army at his own initiative, and then shouts out: "Hurray for regular hours," and "Long live regimentation."[2]

The intensity and exclusiveness of the theme of alienation as attempted in his very first novel shows how deeply Bellow is concerned with the theme. The rather vague ending of the novel again points out that the author might continue to think about the dangling man's dilemma as to how to end his alienation. The protagonist decides in this novel not to live alone and separated from the main currents of life any more--be it as bad as war and however intense his hatred for it may be. But as to what to do after coming out of the war, he is uncertain. Joseph enters the war and the world just to learn that, to find his place in the world.

Many critics have criticized the author for bringing the novel to what apparently seems a very pessimistic end. P. Buitenhuis, for example, writes: "Dangling Man moves greyly towards the conclusion in which at last Joey, with infinite relief, is inducted into the army. The novel ends in a paean of praise for the certainty of determinism."[3] In the view of such critics, Bellow has rejected freedom and choice as an impossible ideal in life.

In my view, however, critics who call the ending of Dangling Man pessimistic have misunderstood the whole point. They make the same

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[2]Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (New York: Vanguard Press, 1944), p. 191.

[3]P. Buitenhuis, "A Corresponding Fabric: the Urban World of Saul Bellow," Costerus, 8(1973), 17.

mistake as those critics who call Henderson's going to Africa an escape from reality. In truth, Joseph's decision to join the army and his jubilation at the decision is an understandable culmination of his situation and a significant turning point in his life which would bring his alienation to an end and make him relate with reality of life in a positive way.

To prove this point I will go back to the beginning of the book, to trace the development of Joseph's thought and the actions which lead him to the decision at the end of the book. I intend to show that his joining the army on his own initiative is a sign that he is forcing himself to relinquish his ego. By joining the army, Joseph hopes to accept the conditions and limitations that external phenomena have for a man. This acceptance of the reality of life would bring him a feeling of harmony and peace with the external world.

It is quite ironic that he has to go to army life, possibly to war itself, to learn how to relate with people. But the period he is passing through is dominated by World War II, and a commitment to society at this time is best expressed in a commitment to the war that has engulfed the whole society. The scope of the novel certainly seems limited here, but having his hero realize the dangers of isolation from society is only the first stage in Bellow's continuous concern with the contemporary problem of alienation.

II

When the book opens, Joseph is apparently at the depth of his alienation from society. This is a turning point for him, because his restlessness has reached a point where he can no longer bear it. He explodes, and given his intellectual nature, his explosion comes out in the form of writing a diary. "Bellow's work," writes Tony Tanner, ". . . is full of 'excellent monologists who want to advance to dialogue.'"[4] This is true of Joseph more than of any other hero of Bellow. The very fact that he starts writing a journal at this point shows that he could not keep his frustration to himself anymore. He has felt the need to communicate, though he does so only in the form of a diary. "In my present stage of demoralization," he writes, "it has become necessary for me to keep a journal--that is, to talk to myself. . . ."[5] His beginning a journal is the first step towards breaking his alienation. He condemns the trend in modern society against talking about one's difficulties to others: "For this is an era of hardboiled-dom. . . . Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them. . . . If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of their commandments. To hell with that. I intend to talk about mine, and if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept

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[4]Tony Tanner, "The Flight from Monologue," Encounter, 24, No. 2 (Feb. 1965), 58. The quote within the quote is from Bellow's article on Gide.

[5]Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (New York: Vanguard Press, 1944), p. 9. Henceforth all references to the novel are from this edition and page numbers are given parenthetically in the text.

them going all the time, I still could not do myself justice" (9). Writing a journal brings him two kinds of satisfaction: he has a feeling of communication, and, by writing down his thoughts, he is trying to understand himself and his problems better.

The aggressive tone of words in his very first entry shows that he is exploding with a long-suppressed desire for communicating his problem to somebody. He leaves the reader in no doubt about the nature of the problem: "In a city where one has lived nearly all his life, it is not likely that he will ever be solitary; and yet, in a very real sense, I am just that" (10).

In this first entry Joseph talks only about his loneliness. About seven months previously, when he received a call for induction into the army, he resigned his job. Now while his wife works, he sits at home awaiting induction. As Irving Malin points out: "In Dangling Man Joseph has no real concept of the family."[6] While he wants to use his wife as well as his friends for his plans, he is afraid of others using him. He has been drifting away from his friends and relatives: "We have friends, but we no longer see them. . . . My Chicago friends and I have been growing steadily apart. I have not been too eager to meet them" (12). Joseph used to be fond of books at one time, but now "I find myself unable to read. Books do not hold me" (10). He understands what this stagnant situation is doing to him: "It is perfectly clear to me that I am deteriorating,

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[6]Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 57.

storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will" (12).

Significantly, in the very next entry, Joseph describes the surroundings from which he has broken away. More with a feeling of guilt and frustration than of jealousy, he thinks of his friends who seem dynamically moving about the world. In reference to one of them he writes in the diary: "I am honestly pleased for his sake, not envious. But the feeling persists that while he rockets to Africa and our friend Stillman travels in Brazil, I grow rooted to my chair. It is a real, a bodily feeling" (13). His movements within the city are extremely limited. He leaves his room only to eat his breakfast or lunch at nearby cafes. Even then he avoids meeting people: "My average radius is three blocks. I am always afraid of running into an acquaintance who will express surprise at seeing me and ask questions. I avoid going down-town and, when I must go, I carefully stay away from certain streets" (13-14).

Within the rooming-house where he lives, he is aware of his relative unimportance: "The maid knocks and pushes open the door. She has a cigarette in her mouth. I think I am the only one before whom she dares smoke; she recognizes that I am of no importance" (15). Talking of these surroundings, his tone is very cool, but sad and melancholic; while he tells us of others, we learn more about himself. Vanakar, the lonely old man next door, coughs and makes other annoying noises "to draw attention to himself" (16). Joseph's awareness of Vanakar's problem is an indication that Joseph himself feels the need of having the others' attention to himself. Later in the novel,

indeed, he goes out of the way to pick quarrels with all kinds of people in order to demand recognition. He admits: "I could have avoided making scenes if I had wished. . . . Trouble, like physical pain, makes us actively aware that we are living, and when there is little in the life we lead to hold and draw and stir us, we seek and cherish it. . . ." (81-82).

His intellectual bent of mind helps him generalize and philosophize about his own condition of loneliness which he feels very acutely. Later in the book when he fails, in spite of serious intentions, to hold peace with people he comes into contact with, he writes: "Only, in my opinion, our rages are deceptive; we are too ignorant and spiritually poor to know that we fall on the 'enemy' from confused motives of love and loneliness. Perhaps, also, self-contempt. But for the most part, loneliness" (147).

Joseph's only connection with the world at this time, and indeed one that best demonstrates his hidden desire to relate with the world, is through the newspaper of which he reads each column from the first page to the last. Except for this connection, his alienation is so complete that he considers his waking period as relatively dead time: "Re-entering waking life after the regeneration (when it is that) of sleep, I go in the body from nakedness to clothing and in the mind from relative purity to pollution. Raising the window, I test the weather; opening the paper, I admit the world" (15). These words of his also point out the extremity of the break between man and nature, of man's estrangement from nature.

The third journal entry reveals Joseph pondering over the abstract questions about the way to achieve happiness in life, particularly from the point of view of an individual's relationship with the world. In connection with his own loathing of life for its meaninglessness, he is reminded of the words of Goethe which he quotes:

> All comfort in life is based upon a regular occurrence of external phenomena. The changes of the day and night, of the seasons, of flowers and fruits, and all other recurring pleasures that come to us, that we may and should enjoy them--these are the mainsprings of our earthly life. The more open we are to these enjoyments, the happier we are; but if these changing phenomena unfold themselves and we take no interest in them, if we are insensible to such fair solicitations, then comes on the sorest evil, the heaviest disease--we regard life as a loathsome burden (18).

These words of Goethe not only carry the solution to Joseph's problem but in fact suggest Bellow's whole thesis about the problem of man's happiness. In order to be happy, man must break out of his ego, his Self, and relate with the external world, with society, nature and eternity. In the present case, Joseph has problems in his relationship with society. D. D. Galloway calls him "a petty clerk who suddenly finds himself a metaphysical outsider dangling between commitments and value systems."[7]

Fed on idealistic, romantic literature, Joseph had become an idealist and made plans in order to achieve the maximum good out of life. "In the last seven or eight years," he writes about himself,

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[7]D. D. Galloway, "The Absurd Man as Picaro: The Novels of Saul Bellow," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 6, No. 2 (Summer 1964), 226.

"he has worked everything out in accordance with a general plan. Into this plan have gone his friends, his family, and his wife" (29). On the one hand, he thought himself a shrewd Machiavellian who could use others for his own good. On the other hand he had a more philosophic than selfish attitude towards the world which gave him a feeling of strangeness: "But for all that, Joseph suffers from a feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it" (30).

Joseph's attitude towards society worsened when, at a party given by his friends, he became painfully aware of the general drunkenness, the frustration, anger and jealousy and hatred of lovers, the awkward presence of strangers, the desperate effort of the hostess to keep the party going, the old, stale jokes and tricks being performed, and the prevailing sense of hostility in the party. His ideal picture of society received a shock whose effect went further than shattering his illusions and his ideals; it erected a wall between himself and society which, from that day forward, he started abhorring and consequently avoiding. His reflections on the party are:

> The party blared on inside, and I began to think what a gathering of this sort meant. And it came to me all at once that the human purpose of these occasions had always been to free the charge of feeling in the pent heart; and that, as animals instinctively sought salt or lime we, too, flew together at this need as we had at Eleusis, with rites and dances, and at other high festivals and corroborees to witness pains and tortures, to give our scorn, hatred, and desire temporary liberty and play. Only we did these things without grace or mystery, lacking the forms for them and, relying on drunkenness, assassinated the Gods in one another and shrieked in vengefulness and hurt. I frowned at this dreadful picture (46).

He now recognized that all his plans were foolish and unrealistic, and "they led him to be untrue to himself. He made mistakes of the sort people make who see things as they wish to see them or, for the sake of their plans, must see them" (39). He consciously decided to stay away from everything and everybody he had been related to: "In the months that followed I began to discover one weakness after another in all I had built up around me. . . . It would be difficult for anyone else to know how this affected me, since no one could understand as well as I the nature of my plans, its rigidity, the extent to which I depended on it. Foolish or not, it had answered my need. The plan could be despised; my need could not be" (57).

As the novel unfolds, Joseph becomes more and more conscious of his alienation from society; he makes effort, desperate effort to reconstruct his relationships, failing which he experiences more frustration and despair. Sleep, at one time a regenerating experience, becomes a sinister adventure: "Night comes, and I have to face another session of sleep--that 'sinister adventure' Baudlaire calls it--and be brought to wakefulness by degrees through a nightmare of reckoning or inventory, my mind flapping like a rag on a clothesline in cold wind" (123).

Above all, Joseph recognizes his loss of self-control. This recognition leads him consciously to decide to put himself in surroundings where he will have to live with others in a program that does not allow separateness.

D. H. Lawrence, talking of the illusion of freedom in America, defined true freedom: "Men are free when they are in a living homeland,

not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community. . . ."[8]

Joseph's decision at the end of Dangling Man to join the army also comes from a failure to live life alone and cut off from society. The dangling man, as Tony Tanner says, "holds himself in brooding apartness to preserve a sense of individual freedom; but, as he realizes, 'goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men.'"[9] Since Joseph is unable on his own to discipline himself for a social life, he decides to join the army where he can learn the necessary discipline. It is a bitter pill he has to swallow, but it is done following an inner voice of his own being, therefore it is an act of freedom.

There is evidence in Joseph's journal that he is uneasy about his alienation from society, and that inwardly he wants to re-establish his relationship with his friends and relatives. He acknowledges that only his stubbornness stops him from admitting that he has no use for his detachment from society. Coupled with his stubbornness is his false pride in having seen what he calls the "craters of the spirit," by which he refers to his glimpses into his own inner lonely self. His stubbornness and his pride and self-pity stand in his way whenever he does try to be an accepted part of society. His ego does

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[8]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classical American Literature (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 6.

[9]Tony Tanner, 58.

not allow him to tolerate the resistance he meets although he himself encourages others to resist his company. His behaviour has become undependable. His hesitant attempts to relate with others become aggressive whenever he encounters a little resistance. When a former comrade (Joseph had at one time an active interest in communism) ignores him in a restaurant, he attacks him almost physically because "He has no business ignoring me. This is always happening to me." And then "I have a right to be spoken to. It's the most elementary thing in the world. Simply that. I insist on it" (33).

Similarly, he annoys his father-in-law when he goes to visit him, fights and spanks his haughty niece, shouts at and lifts his hand over Vanakar, and picks a quarrel at the bank where he goes to cash his wife's check. And he knows that whatever the situation, the real cause of his trouble with people is his inability to accept society with its short-comings and imperfections. This inability has increased and become stronger with time. He stays at home and does not want to accept either of the two Christmas invitations he and his wife have received. His friends send him news, but he has nothing to write back. He holds a talk with his own conscience which rightly accosts him with the question: "If you're not alienated, why do you quarrel with so many people? . . . Is it because they force you to recognize that you belong to their world?" (138).

The world surrounding Joseph doesn't seem very attractive to him. On a dull, wintry evening he looks out from his window and wonders if Goethe would still be comfortable about life. He has built around himself an oppressive feeling of the meaninglessness and ugliness of

life. He calls himself a moral tragedy of the war because he feels that "the world comes after you. It presents you with a gun or a mechanic's tool, . . . whatever you do, you cannot dismiss it" (137).

The important point is that Joseph has at least the hint of the answer to his problem. He suspects that the wrong may lie in his own way of looking at things. "The failing may be in us," he writes, "in me. A weakness of vision" (137). R. G. Davis makes a relevant observation when he says that "Before he had sorrowed for men condemned to live amidst such ugliness and squalor. Now he sees all these uglinesses as symptoms, expressions. 'What men create, they also were.'"[10]

In a second conversation with his conscience, which he calls the Spirit of Alternatives, he confesses in regard to himself that the first thing to do is to stop living the way he has been living. It is following the same feeling that Henderson in the later novel goes to Africa. Joseph's Africa is to be the war, for there he hopes to learn how to work and live among other people, just as Henderson learns from his African experiences how to relate with the large universe surrounding him.

At many places in Dangling Man, war and life have been mentioned together as a parallel. When his brother advises him to try to achieve a higher rank in the army, Joseph says that he doesn't want to become an officer because that would mean raising himself through war. Amos

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[10]R. G. Davis, "The American Individualist Tradition: Bellow and Styron," The Creative Present, ed. N. Balakian and C. Simmons (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963), p. 114.

tells him that there have to be officers and he shouldn't "sit back and let some cluck do what you can do a thousand times better?" (64). Joseph's answer to this shows that he hates life as much as war, and for the same reasons--for its social and economic inequalities: "That's the case in many departments of life already. The army's no exception" (64). Actually, Joseph seems all the time fighting with himself as well as with others. His present life is almost a war. He uses war imagery for his condition in life: "I'm a chopped and shredded man" (164).

Joseph is constantly conscious of how the war had claimed the involvement of everybody around him, and he feels guilty of staying away himself:

> I would be denying my inmost feelings if I said I wanted to be by-passed and spared from knowing what the rest of my generation is undergoing. I don't want to be humped protectively over my life. I am neither so corrupt nor so hard-boiled that I can savor my life only when it is in danger of extinction. But, on the other hand, its value here in this room is decreasing day by day. Soon it may become distasteful to me (166).

War is a dangerous thing but, he realizes, it is no reason why he should stay away from it. At this point in his life, when war is always there in the background, the question of his commitment to society or the world is to be judged in terms of his inner conflict about whether to join the war. He tells himself that it is his vanity to think that he can "make my own way toward clarity. But it is even more important to know whether I can claim the right to preserve myself in this flood of death that has carried off so many like me, muffling them and bearing them down and down, . . . It is appropriate

to ask whether I have any business withholding myself from the same fate" (166-167). The incident of war is so central here and the involvement of the world in the war has gone to such degree that if Joseph at this point wants to end his alienation, he can prove it, demonstrate it to himself and to the world, only by joining the war.

And joining the war has another meaning for him. Till now he has been avoiding his social commitments even against his own intentions. His ego and his disappointment with society have made him a habitual avoider. But if he joins war as a commitment towards the world, he cannot possibly avoid involvement. He will cease to be the avoider of people that he has been so far. As Galloway writes: "His idiopathic freedom has isolated him so painfully that he at last seeks social accommodation within the ranks of the army."[11] If he has a fear of war, he knows that it is due to his narrowness of vision: "Suppose I had a complete vision of life. I would not then be affected essentially. The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria. I must be concerned with them, naturally. I must take account of them. They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny in spite of them" (168).

Joseph's problems are in relation to the society around him. Apparently, he is trying to find out an answer to the very meaning of life, or of his own self. But an answer to this does not exist away from the society of which he is a member. He asks himself: "What is

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[11]D. D. Galloway, "The Absurd Man as Picaro," p. 230.

this (life) for? and "What am I for?" and "Am I made for this?" But he discovers that his beliefs and theories about life are a poor answer to these questions: "My beliefs are inadequate, they do not guard me. I think invariably of the awning of the store on the corner. It gives me as much protection against rain and wind as my beliefs give against the chaos I am forced to face" (123). He realizes that life's meaning and purpose exist only when he relates himself with other people. When his friend Alf tells Joseph that his main concern in life is getting by, Joseph asks with a definite note of self-pity in his voice: "How do you get by, Alf?" (130). When he tells Steidler "that I was preparing myself spiritually, that I was willing to be a member of the Army, but not a part of it," Steidler thinks this a very witty answer. "He believes that I am a natural comedian and laughs at everything I say" (133-134). Here is contained the tragedy of one's discovery of the gap between the reality and the ideal. Joseph's attitude about army here also indicates his attitude towards society in general. His answer about the army implies his meaningless desire to belong to society without accepting the unpleasant realities of it. The music of his liking that he plays at his brother's place and that annoys his childish niece, says the same thing about life: life like war includes suffering and humiliation, but the solution is not in isolating yourself but in undergoing it with nobility and "with grace, without meanness. And though I could not as yet apply that answer to myself, I recognized its rightness and was vehemently moved by it. Not until I was a whole man could it be my answer, too" (67).

Bellow's heroes in the other novels to be discussed in this thesis are also trying to be "the whole man" which one is not until one relates with the reality outside oneself. While in his life till now, Joseph has been at war with himself, the actual war always present in the background of his mind, now becomes a test for his committing himself to a life outside himself.

That Joseph comes to realize that war is a part of life and while all others are involved in it, he must involve himself too, is only half the reason for his joining the army on his own initiative, though this in itself is enough to show that by this decision he has given a big blow to his alienated self. But equally important is the fact that he has come to realize that participation and expectation are indispensable. "The best solution," he writes, "would be to live as if the ordinary expectations had not been removed, not from day to day, blindly; but that requires immense self-mastery" (148).

And he lacks the self-mastery; his ego and his guilt are too strong. He now knows that "the highest 'ideal construction' is the one that unlocks the imprisoning self" (153). Critics like Malin have drawn attention to the recurrence of the image of imprisonment in Bellow's novels. Like many other Bellow protagonists, Joseph makes many attempts to free himself from his imprisoning self, but he fails to hold his patience. He picks a quarrel with a well-wishing visiting friend. Then he laughs in self-contempt: "I just happened to think that I'm always hoping a visitor will come. When he does come, I insult him." He adds: "I see people so seldom, I've forgotten how to act. I don't want to be bad-tempered" (157).

Joseph's intellectual talent helps him to understand his own problem, but it does not help him to change himself. In spite of his realization of the need to disengage from the self and the Ego, he is unable to do so in practical situations. His reaction to public life remains aggressive. Towards the end of the novel he comes to realize that in a situation like his the best thing is to put oneself in the hands of external forces for sometime: ". . . , while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away. We do not know how. So, at times, we throw ourselves away" (153-154).

But, in deciding to go to war, Joseph is not entirely throwing himself away. He is already aware that today man needs conscious preparation for life; each one of us has to seek his freedom. When we don't seem to do so, our cyclonic wishes are baffled, and pride requires us to be indifferent" (133). Joseph thinks of the past when life was lived more in natural harmony. Like Henderson, he is reminded of his childhood when small, human acts made him happy: "To make a dirty surface clean--a very simple, very human matter. I, while shining shoes, grew partly aware of it" (113). Now, life needs conscious preparation: "Great pressure is brought to bear to make us undervalue ourselves. On the other hand, civilization teaches us that each of us is an inestimable prize. There are, then, these two preparation: one for life and the other for death" (119). To prepare for one is actually to prepare for the other too. Talking with his visiting friend Adler, Joseph quotes a French saying: "C'est la guerre.

C'est la vie." Referring to a common friend's death in the war, Joseph simply repeats: "C'est la vie" (158-159).

The difference between the pre-civilization man and today's man, of which Bellow is always aware, is also hinted at in the novel: "Six hundred years ago, a man was what he was born to be . . ., his place among other men was given. It could not be contested. But, since, the state has been reset and human beings only walk on it, and, under this revision, we have, instead, history to answer to. . . . Now, each of us is responsible for his own salvation. . . ." (88-89). Bellow's belief in a conscious re-organization of life is emphasized here in his very first book. Human imagination, consciously used, will create the world that has been lost with the loss of innocence. Joseph's intellectual comprehension of his situation helps him experience moments of beauty and contentment that were once the natural and permanent privilege of man: "The icicles and frost patterns on the window turned brilliant; the trees, like instruments, opened all their sounds into the wind, and the bold, icy colors of sky and snow and clouds burned strongly. A day for a world without deformity or threat of damage. . . ." (118-119).

But such glimpses are rare. Their value is only to lift man from despair, and give him hope to make himself consciously prepare for reality and happiness.

The awareness of death is always haunting Joseph. Staying away from war does not make him immortal. What, then, is the difference between life and war? To avoid war is to avoid life itself. He realizes that "we are insulated here from the war. If we chose, we

could pull the blinds and fling the paper into the hall for Marie to gather up, casting it out utterly" (169). A decision has to be made between going out to war or staying in the room and not living.

His Spirit of Alternatives suggests: "Wouldn't you rather be in motion, outside, somewhere?" to which he replies: "Sometimes I think nothing could be better" (166). Struggling to make a decision, he tells himself: "Now, in a case of mine, I can't ask to be immune from the war. I have to take my risks for survival as I did, formerly, against childhood diseases and all the dangers and accidents through which I nevertheless managed to become Joseph" (167). To keep his identity intact, Joseph has to decide to go to war and open himself to all the risks war contains, just as, as a child, he opened himself to diseases that are equally a part of life. "We cannot make ourselves immortal. We can decide only what is for us to decide" (167).

Joseph decides to request his immediate induction: "I must give myself up. And I recognized that the breath of warm air was simultaneously a breath of relief at my decision to surrender" (183). He is called for the medical test: "I waited in line at the field house, under the thin trees. In the gymnasium I took off my clothes, marched naked around the floor with the others. . . ." (188). Henderson, too, in a ceremony of regeneration, would be disrobed. This symbolic disrobing is meant to lift the veil that divides man from his surroundings, thus to bring him into more direct relation with what he has come to consider the outward.

On the next-to-the-last day of his civilian life, Joseph feels a great sense of freedom and release:

> It was suddenly given me to experience one of those consummating glimpses that come to all of us periodically. The room, delusively, dwindled and became a tiny square, swiftly drawn back, myself and all the objects in it growing smaller. This was not a mere visual trick. I understood it to be a revelation of the ephemeral agreements by which we live and pace ourselves. I looked around at the restored walls (190).

He realizes that in order to feel free in this world we must be able to embrace all reality, apparently divided into small, insignificant pieces, into one wide vision:

> And I rose rather unsteadily from the rocker, feeling that there was an element of treason to common sense in the very objects of common sense. Or that there was no trusting them, save through wide agreement, and that my separation from such agreement had brought me perilously far from the necessary trust, auxiliary to all sanity. I had not done well alone. I doubted whether anyone could. To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt. Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room (190-191).

Thus he goes to war to learn about life, to prepare himself for it. It is not a surrender of himself before the forces of determinism, but a relinquishing of the ego, an effort to end his alienation and make a new start in life.

Joseph is jubilant over the fact that he has at last made a conscious decision to commit himself to the reality outside him which at the present time is focused in the war he is going to join. The war is both a horrible incident and a symbol of external reality at the moment. As far as it is a dreaded event, Joseph overcomes his

fear and hesitation by reminding himself that one has to take risks and face dangers at all times in life. But his acceptance of war, his conscious decision to join it, comes from his awareness of the importance of war in the lives of people at that time. Like all others he too must be a part of it. Therein lies his commitment. It is a part of his commitment to society.

CHAPTER TWO

I

In Henderson the Rain King, Bellow shows a firmer grip on the theme of alienation, in that he suggests here a definite way of curing it. I plan to show this by analyzing the effects of the African trip on Henderson in this novel, for it is in Africa--the imaginative Africa of Bellow--that he cures his alienation.

It is clear from even a casual reading of the novel that Henderson, who is confused, disturbed and dissatisfied with his life before going to Africa, is a changed man at the end of his trip. Something has taken place during his stay with the two tribes there, that has given solace to his disturbed soul. My purpose is to analyze his trouble, to investigate the nature of his reactions and responses to his African adventures, and to explain the precise nature of the change brought about in him by these adventures.

I plan to treat this problem from the particular point of view of Henderson's attitude and response to his surroundings, for it is a change in his own attitude that brings a change in his life. I also plan to relate Henderson's problem to the thesis of Owen Barfield in his book, Saving the Appearances, for Bellow has confessed to being greatly influenced by Barfield. Referring to Saving the Appearances and Rudolph Steiner's book on theosophy, Bellow told an interviewer: "I was impressed by the idea that there were forms of understanding, discredited now, which had long been the agreed basis of human knowledge.

We think we can know the world scientifically, but actually our ignorance is terrifying."[1]

Comparing modern man's relationship to the universe with that of primitive man, Barfield writes: "Before the scientific revolution the world was more like a garment men wore about them than a stage on which they moved. In such a world the convention of perspective was unnecessary. . . . It was as if the observers were themselves in the picture. Compared with us, they felt themselves and the objects around them and the words that expressed those objects, immersed together in something like a clear lake of what shall we say?--of meaning. . . ."[2]

Barfield says that primitive man's participation with the phenomena of nature was conscious, an advantage that gave him a sense of unity and meaning in the universe. For him the spirit world or, in the Sanskrit terminology, 'Mana' (the Being), was represented in the phenomena as in himself, thus relating him to the phenomena. The modern man, on the other hand, whose outlook has become basically scientific (which implies man's examination of the external phenomena as objects separate from him) is not conscious of any kind of participation. He is not even aware of the 'figuration' of the phenomena by him. Figuration, according to Barfield, "is all that in the representation which is not sensation. For, as the organs of sense are

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[1]W. Clemons and J. Kroll, "America's Master Novelist," Newsweek (1 Sep. 1975), p. 39.

[2]Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances (New York: A Harbinger Book, year of publication not given), pp. 94-95.

required to convert the unrepresented ('particles') into sensations for us, so something is required in us to convert sensations into 'things.' It is this something that I mean."[3] Modern man, with his growing scientific approach, has lost "his grip on any principle of unity pervading nature as a whole. . . ."[4] The result is the growth of "idolatry" which, in the words of Barfield, "is the effective tendency to abstract the sense-content from the whole representation and seek that for its own sake, transmuting the admired image into a desired object."[5] While man makes tremendous use of the objects, he also suffers from a sense of isolation and alienation caused by this separation from or lack of participation with the external phenomena. Idolatry and this separation between man and the outside reality also lie at the root of Henderson's dilemma as the novel opens.

The solution to the problem, in Barfield's view, lies in the systematic use of "imagination," ". . . not only for the increase of knowledge, but also for saving the appearances from chaos and inanity."[6] According to Barfield, man cannot and should not try to become like primitive man. What should be done is that man should have such an intellectual comprehension of his relationship with the phenomena, of his participation with it, that he can consciously relate with what he now considers separate from him. This can be done

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[3]Barfield, p. 24.

[4]Ibid., p. 145.

[5]Ibid., pp. 110-111.

[6]Ibid., p. 146.

with what he calls "imagination," which he defines in these words: "To be able to experience the representations as idols, and then to be able also to perform the act of figuration consciously, so as to experience them as participated; that is imagination."[7] This puts man into the role of a creator, for now the participation has been consciously created by man.

In the novel under study here, Henderson is undergoing an emotional collapse because he, unlike most of his fellow-beings, is acutely sensitive to the seeming chaos surrounding him. He is painfully aware of the meaninglessness of the materialism around him. In order to seek an escape from it he accompanies his newly married friends on their photographic trip to Africa. The inclusion of a photographic trip by Henderson's friends seems intentional here on Bellow's part in that it brings out an effective contrast with Henderson's disgust with the object world. Barfield too refers to photography as a sign of idolatry. As long as Henderson keeps company with his friends, there is no change in his emotional condition. "Photography," says Henderson, "is not one of my interests."[8] Henderson cannot bear idolatry in Africa anymore than he could in America.

Henderson leaves his friends and follows the lead of a native African, Romilayu, to take him into the unknown interior, away from

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[7]Barfield, p. 147.

[8]Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 41. Henceforth all references to this book are from this edition and page numbers are given parenthetically following the quotes.

civilization. He did not know what to expect: "It was not for me to ask, since my object in coming here was to leave certain things behind" (45). Looking just for an escape, he ends up finding a solution to his problem of alienation that is very much the same as the one described by Barfield. The solution lies in the use of imagination in a way that seems very parallel to Barfield's concept. As Walter Clemons and Jack Kroll write: "For Bellow, Barfield's work represents a vigorous claim for the importance of poetic imagination."[9] To examine where and how Henderson learns this is the object of this chapter.

II

Henderson begins his account of the African trip by first trying to explain the reasons for it. But as he himself admits: "There is no quick explanation" (3). Nor does he find the explanation clear for, as he says, "Things got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated" (3). Still he tries to list them: "A disorderly rush begins--my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutalities, my teeth, my face, my soul" (3). He speaks of them as if they are outside, outward objects that harmed him and to which he did not feel related. On the other hand, the constant use of the first person possessive pronoun shows his obsession with the self, pointing out a separateness from the surrounding

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[9] W. Clemons and J. Kroll, "America's Master Novelist," p. 39.

phenomena. Henderson cannot decide which of these things was responsible for his troubles. Nor is it important for our purpose to find out a precise answer to this. What is important for us, however, is to see how he looked and responded to the world around him, what the state of his mind was, what he lacked or wanted at that time. This information, fortunately, Henderson is in a position to make available to us, for, if anything, he is most honest about himself.

Joseph in Dangling Man poured out his feelings in his journal, going against society's edict that you aren't supposed to have problems or to talk about them. Like Huck Finn and Ishmael, Bellow's protagonists are compulsive talkers. Henderson is no exception.

Before going to Africa he was emotionally too weak to hide feelings: "I am not good at suppressing my feelings. Whole crowds of them, especially the bad ones, wave to the world from the galleries of my face. I can't prevent them" (53). And at the time he is writing his autobiography--if we can call it so--he has already found peace within himself and with the world: "However, the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me" (3). He is relaxed and in harmony with his surroundings and therefore he is in the right condition of body and mind to relate his past.

Returning to our point then, we see that the predominant characteristic of his condition before going to Africa was constant restlessness and anxiety that revealed itself in his angry, intolerant and aggressive behaviour with everything around. At times it made him look very egotistic and self-centred. Talking of his present wife, Lily, he says: "No, I treated her like a stranger before the guests

because I didn't like to see her behave and carry on like the lady of the house; because I, the sole heir of this famous name and estate, am a bum, and she is not a lady but merely my wife--merely my wife" (6).

Henderson had a heavy, bulky body; he was rich, he had served in the war--he could thus pick quarrels and fight and get away with it. " . . . no wonder people got out of my way" (5). But this aggressive, bullying attitude brought him no satisfaction. It was a symptom of something that had gone wrong somewhere in his life, and his condition was pathetic even to himself. He remembers "that there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, I want, I want, I want. It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it it got even stronger. It only said one thing, I want, I want" (24). There is a sexual tone to this voice of "I want," "I want," and like the desire for mating, there was a longing in it for communication and union with the outward. The phrase "I want, I want," as E. L. Rodrigues informs us, is taken from William Blake in whose book For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise it is the caption to a drawing showing a man taking his first step on the ladder that reaches to the moon. Blake's influence on Bellow has been widely recognized. The image of Blake's feeling of oneness with all creation stands as an ideal for Bellow's heroes to achieve. In the absence of such feeling of oneness with the external, life appeared meaningless to Henderson. No activity or play or amusement stopped this voice in him for it was not asking for artificial satisfaction. He tried many remedies that civilization offered to pacify a restless soul--like music: "Among

other remedies I took up the violin" (25). He picked up the same violin as his father had at one time used--also in search of peace. Henderson himself tells us that his father too "could not settle into a quiet life either" (25). Even his wife Lily did not find loneliness abnormal. Talking in reference to her fiance before she married Henderson, she told him: "But I am learning to get along alone. There's always the universe. A woman doesn't have to marry, and there are perfectly good reasons why people should be lonely" (27). Henderson is aware that "Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. . . . There are displaced persons everywhere" (34).

Henderson suffered more than most people because he, unlike them, did not find fulfilment in the toys that science has given man for his amusement. His money, his body, his name meant nothing to him because he was neither able to love them for their own sake, nor did he have an awareness of unity pervading the cosmos in which to recognize their place. On the other hand, he was aware of a "cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying" (19).

To use the language of Barfield, Henderson did not consciously participate, he did not have any sense of unity or relation with the universe he inhabited. He was the extreme example of "the intelligent man" who, Alan Watts, writes, "feels independent or cut off from the rest of nature."[10] Watts would say that Henderson lacked "cosmic

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[10]Alan Watts, "Instinct, Intelligence, and Anxiety," This Is It and Other Essays (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 45.

consciousness," his term to describe the same feeling of being a part of the universe as representation of the Being, the Mana.

This condition of Henderson becomes clear from his reaction in those days to flowers:

> The crimson begonias, and the dark green and the radiant green and the spice that pierces and the sweet gold and the dead transformed, the brushing of the flowers on my undersurface are just misery to me. They make me crazy with misery. To somebody these things may have been given, but that somebody is not me in the red velvet robe. So what am I doing here? (29).

Idolatry, of which Barfield speaks, makes men either naturalists who love the visible nature for its own sake, or materialists who love comfort and possession of things. Henderson's peculiar condition is that the lack of what I have earlier called cosmic consciousness in him is not compensated for by either a love of nature or of material things, as it is in the case of most people. Henderson finds material as useless or meaningless as he finds nature:

> A man like me may become something like a trophy. Washed, clean, and dressed in expensive garments. Under the roof is insulation; on the windows thermopane; on the floors carpeting; and on the carpets furniture, and on the furniture covers, and on the cloth covers plastic covers; and wall-paper and drapes. All is swept and garnished. And who is in the midst of this? Who is sitting there? Man. That's who it is, man. (24).

Henderson's sensitivity to this idolatry of man is partially caused by the fact that he remembers having experienced cosmic consciousness or conscious participation in the external phenomena, in his childhood. He remembers: "It is very early in life, and I am out in the grass. The sun flames and swells; the heat it emits is its love,

too. I have this self-same vividness in my heart. There are dandelions. I try to gather up this green. I put my love-swollen cheek to the yellow of the dandelions. I try to enter into the green" (238). Missing this spirit of childhood now, and surrounded by the apparent chaos all round, he starts hating everything. At the same time he, unlike most people, is aware of a longing for something positive and real in life.

J. H. Campbell finds a relevant parallel between what has happened to Henderson since childhood and Wordsworth's theme of the corrupting influence of the civilized life on a child who is born with feeling of oneness with the whole creation, as seen in his poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." Campbell writes: "Wordsworth describes the subsequent influence of the world on the child in terms of an actor who plays many parts as he fills his 'humorous stage' with various types of personalities, making imitation his whole vocation. 'Humorous' here obviously does not mean comic, but refers to the four 'humors' of medieval physiology or Ben Jonson's plays. The bulk of Henderson's story reflects this Wordsworthian insight. Henderson has felt the prison house of life pressing in on him. He wants something else."[11]

Henderson has seen death and disease and dirt and death. He has grown cynical because he can't accept them in an overall picture of life that can give him a sense of unity and meaning in life. He is like Guatma before Guatma became Buddha through Enlightenment and

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[11] J. H. Campbell, "Bellow's Intimations of Immortality: Henderson the Rain King," Studies in the Novel, 1 (Fall, 1969), 329.

Nirvana. Like Guatma, Henderson sees suffering and disease and he wonders why man should suffer from them:

> Oh, it's miserable to be human. You get such queer diseases. Just because you're human and for no other reason. Before you know it, as the years go by, you're just like other people you have seen, with all those peculiar human ailments. Just another vehicle for temper and vanity and rashness and all the rest. Who wants it? Who needs it? These things occupy the place where a man's soul should be (83).

Troubled and restless, Henderson, according to Opdahl, "is incapable of either relaxation or acceptance of defeat."[12]

The death of the old woman who used to fix their breakfast gave a renewed shock to Henderson--he was again brought face to face with the reality of death and the implied sense of futility of life. He saw that what the old woman had left behind was not a memory or soul but a houseful of junk that she had collected during her life. This fact became symbolically important to Henderson, and he cried out: "Oh, shame, shame. Oh, crying shame. How can we? Why do we allow ourselves? What are we doing? The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows. So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left. While something still is--now. For the sake of all, get out" (40).

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[12] K. M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 122.

After this he leaves for Africa to make, in the words of Tanner, "a colossal effort of disburdenment because he feels his true self is lying 'buried' within him under all the clutter and junk."[13] The disburdening of the fear of death, of the weight of alienation from the external phenomena will be achieved through a better understanding of the self. A change in the self will be accomplished through imagination.

Henderson's very first reaction, while flying over Africa, is indicative of what is to follow: "Africa reached my feelings right away even in the air, from which it looked like the ancient bed of mankind" (42). This feeling suggests that it was with the 'modern' bed of mankind that he had felt disgusted, since this vague awareness of the ancient, the primitive, is already satisfying to him. He felt a strong sense of 'life' here; he "kept thinking, 'Bountiful life. Oh, how bountiful life is.' I felt I might have a chance here" (42-43). For the moment the voice in his heart was silent. But it again came back, and he parted company with his friends.

With Romilayu, his personal guide in the mysterious Africa, he went into the interior of the Continent: "I felt I was entering the past--the real past, no history or junk like that. The prehuman past. And I believed that there was something between the stones and me" (46). This feeling was vague, uncertain and short-lived at the moment, but in the primitive man before the scientific era, according to Barfield, it was intensely and permanently experienced. He writes

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[13] T. Tanner, p. 60.

that "the most striking difference between primitive figuration and ours is, that the primitive involves 'participation', that is, an awareness which we no longer have, of an extra-sensory link between the percipient and the representations."[14] Henderson is a modern man, and after short-lived mystical experiences like these, his 'intelligent' mind came to dominate him again. This shift in his response to his surroundings while in Africa took place again and again, as if his basic primitive self, or the memory of it, was struggling against his modern scientific self. Bellow's heroes, tormented by their isolation and alienation, occasionally have glimpses of their oneness with the total universe in the old, primitive way. The concept of man's nostalgic feeling for the eternal world of soul is treated at some length in Bellow's latest work, Humboldt's Gift. Here in Henderson the Rain King the nostalgia is for the primitive's feeling of oneness with nature.

Henderson looked at the black people of the Arnewi tribe that he first met, and he instinctively noticed the influence of the natural elements on them. He observed that "the dark was more deeply burnt in about the eyes whereas the palms of their hands were the color of freshly washed granite. As if, you know, they had played catch with the light and some of it had come off. . . . So I stood there waiting, surrounded by this black humanity in the aromatic dust, with that inanimate brilliance coming off the thatch of the huts nearby" (51).

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[14]Barfield, p. 34.

His going to Africa was not a mere geographical change, as it was for his friends. Henderson says: "I'm still not convinced that I didn't penetrate beyond geography" (55). He was experiencing insights every moment that fascinated him with their beauty. He felt the phenomena of life there to be so unique, so different from the one he had left behind, that it appeared like "so many medicines which would either cure my condition or aggravate it" (65).

When he was introduced to the queen, Willatale, and he put his hand between her breasts as a ceremony of greetings, "there was the calm pulsation of her heart participating in the introduction. This was as regular as the rotation of the earth, and it was a surprise to me; my mouth came open and my eyes grew fixed as if I were touching the secrets of life; . . ." (72). The use of the word "participation" is important here in order to understand Barfield's concept of the primitive's participation in the phenomena and its applicability to Henderson's experiences in Africa. Henderson observed Itelo's wives and commented that the naked women had "the dark color worked in deeply around the eyes as if by special action of the sun. The lighter skin of their hands reminded me continually of pink stone" (55). Henderson already became aware of the difference between these primitive people and the modern man like himself in the way the two related with the surrounding nature:

> The earth is a huge ball which nothing holds up in space except its own motion and magnetism, and we conscious things who occupy it believe we have to move too, in our own space. We can't allow ourselves to lie down and not do our share and imitate the greater entity. You see, this is our attitude. But now look at Willatale, the Bittah

> woman; she had given up such notions, there was no anxious care in her, and she was sustained. . . . Look how happy she was, . . . It comforted me just to see her, and I felt that I might learn to be sustained too if I followed her example (79).

Henderson, moving ahead in his journey towards a conscious participation, or a cosmic consciousness, reminded himself again and again of the wrong, negative attitude of modern man. "Myself," he mused, "I used to have a certain interest in hunting, but as I grew older it seemed a strange way to relate to nature. What I mean is, a man goes into the external world, and all he can do with it is to shoot it? It doesn't make sense" (94).

The question of man and nature is central to Bellow's hero here, as it is to Barfield's whole concept of participation. It is central because the individual and his fellow-men are part of nature. Therefore if one sees nature as mother, one will accept his fellow-beings as brothers too. One loves them, and one draws one's life from them. Towards the end of his African trip, Henderson comes out with this realization--that the only way to relate to nature and to mankind is through love: "I've gotten to that age where I need human voices and intelligence. That's all that's left. Kindness and love" (316).

And yet, while in the Arnewi tribe, Henderson's glimpses of the desirable relationship between man and nature remained short-lived. "Somehow I am a sucker for beauty and can trust only it, but I keep passing through and out of it again. It never has enough duration. I know it is near because my gums begin to ache; I grow confused, my breast melts, and then bang, the thing is gone. Once more I am on

the wrong side of it. However, this tribe of people, the Arnewi, seemed to have it in steady supply" (98).

One such short-lived experience occurred when, getting up one early morning, he saw "the light at day break against the white clay of the wall beside me and had an extraordinary effect, . . . Some powerful magnificence not human, in other words, seemed under me. . . . It must have been at least fifty years since I had encountered such a color, . . . (100-101). Henderson understood its importance well: "My soul was in quite a condition, but not hectically excited; it was a state as mild as the color itself. I said to myself, 'I knew that this place was of old.' Meaning, I had sensed from the first that I might find things here which were of old, which I saw when I was still innocent and have longed for ever since, for all my life--and without which I could not make it" (102).

But Henderson was still a restless man; he had great energy which found expression only in ruthlessness and impatience. He had not yet achieved any self-discipline by conscious effort. He was still carried away by emotions and ideas, one of which at this time was to help the Arnewi people in some way or the other. The point was not to help them, but to satisfy his own desire to help them. He hit upon the idea of destroying the frogs that polluted the water in the pond from which the Arnewi people and their cattle drank. The motives to do so were confusing in his own mind: "Thus having decided in the hut to take the shells and use them in my bomb, I lay grinning at the surprise those frogs had coming, and also somewhat at myself, because I was anticipating the gratitude of Willatale and

Mtalba and Itelo and all the people; and I went so far as to imagine that the queen would elevate me to a position equal to her own. But I would say, 'No, no. I didn't leave home to achieve power or glory, and any little favor I do you is free'" (94). Like the motives, the results of his adventure with frogs were an utter confusion. Carried away by the idea, he destroyed not only the frogs but also the pond itself. Consequently, he had to leave the tribe in disgrace. Opdahl writes that Henderson's disgrace was caused by "his inability to accept either the limitation or the gift of life."[15] In trying to destroy the frogs in the pond, he was acting against nature. But, despite his disgrace from this last act, or perhaps because of it, he had learnt a very valuable lesson from this tribe, from the queen Willatale--that life could be happy and meaningful, and that he could make it so too. This was the message contained in the words that Willatale spoke to him: "Grun-tu-molani" (99).

III

The Arnewi experience gave Henderson a hope that life could be made happy. It was with the Wariri, however, the second and last tribe he went to, that he underwent a kind of conscious training that ultimately led him to "participate" in the phenomena and thus discover a meaning in existence. He took this training from the Wariri king, Dahfu, who impressed Henderson as one he would like to imitate. Henderson could see the difference between Dahfu and himself: "He

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[15]Opdahl, p. 129.

seemed all ease, and I all limitation. He was extended, floating; I was contracted and cramped. . . . Yes, he was soaring like a spirit while I sank like a stone. . . ." (160). Two important incidents took place at Wariri that involved Henderson: first, Henderson's victory over Mummah the goddess of clouds; second, his instruction by Dahfu, including the encounter with Atti, the lioness.

Due to a long draught in the area, the Wariri people organized a ritual in which gods were to be persuaded to make rain. The ritual was a very noisy, chaotic and barbaric affair to Henderson until he was involved in it. There was dancing, singing, shouting; the air was full of crimson flags and ribbons; there was animal sacrifice; the king and one of his women played catch with skulls of former kings. All this happened around the statues of gods, the chief and biggest among them being that of Mummah, the goddess of clouds. The final ceremony was to wrestle with the gods and to lift them from where they stood. It was supposed to rain when Mummah was lifted. Henderson was struck by the familiarity and intimacy between people and gods. People appeared to be playfully lifting the smaller gods, still there was a seriousness about it: " . . .; they were after all gods, and they made the awards of fate. They ruled the air, the mountains, fire, plants, cattle, luck, sickness, clouds, birth, death" (181).

After all other gods had been lifted and taken to the other side, efforts were made by the strongest of Wariri people to lift Mummah, but without success. Henderson again saw a chance for himself to do something for others. The desire to lift Mummah seemed to him to answer the constant cry of his soul, "I want, I want." He sought

Dahfu's permission to lift Mummah: "King, I'm going to give you the straight poop about myself, as straight as I can make it. Every man born has to carry his life to a certain depth--or else. Well, king, I'm beginning to see my depth. You wouldn't expect me to back away now, would you?" (191). He got the permission, and lifted the goddess.

Henderson's triumph over Mummah gave him a feeling of great satisfaction; it soothed the wound of self-humiliation caused earlier by his failure with the frogs at Arnewi. At wariri, it was a case of ego becoming so strong as to penetrate everything outside to make it all one. In this respect, the statue of Mummah became a symbol of the cosmic spirit to which man always belongs and which at the same time appears as a challenge to man, as an external thing. Henderson loved the goddess, but at the same time he was possessed with the desire to lift it, to defeat it: "I encircled Mummah with my arms. I wasn't going to take no for an answer. I pressed my belly upon her and sank my knees somewhat. She smelled like a living old woman. Indeed, to me she was a living personality, not an idol. We met as challenged and challenger, but also as intimates" (192).

His feeling and awareness were so intense at that time that he felt that he could look into the reality of his own existence and its relation with all life, all creation: "I was so gladdened by what I had done that my whole body was filled with soft heat, with soft and sacred light. . . . And so my fever was transformed into jubilation. My spirit was awake and it welcomed life anew (192-193). It helped him to "get into my depth. That real depth. I mean that

depth where I have always belonged" (193). According to H. E. Toliver, Henderson had better luck with Mummah because of "the kind of correspondence between the inner man and nature that both magic and dreams assume."[16]

Thus we can say that Henderson failed with the frogs because of his egotistic approach. He succeeded with Mummah because he viewed her as an intimate--a living goddess. In the former, there was an expression of ego; in the latter, an unconscious depersonalization was taking place. In the ceremonies and celebrations following the lifting of Mummah, the depersonalization was physically performed. Henderson's clothes were completely removed, "and I was naked. The air was my only garment now" (197). In these words of his one hears the echo of what Barfield said about the primitives' participation: Before the scientific revolution the world was more like a garment men wore about them. . . . The puzzled Henderson looked at Dahfu. "It is not merely dress," said Dahfu, "You are the Sungo. It is literal, Mr. Henderson. . . ." (211). Henderson, of course, could take it only as symbolic--not literal. Barfield too emphasizes the same point when he quotes the anthropologist Levy-Bruhl: "The collective representations and interconnections which constitute such a (primitive) mentality are governed by the law of participation and in so far they take but little account of the law of contradiction."[17]

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[16]H. E. Toliver, Pastoral Forms and Attitudes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 328.

[17]Barfield, p. 31.

The primitives did not consciously invent spirits or mythical figures as explanations for mysterious happenings. Participation was an activity that did not admit of contradiction. Barfield again quotes Levy-Bruhl: "The mystic properties with which things are imbued form an integral part of the idea to the primitive who views it as a synthetic whole."[18] Similarly Henderson was seen as Sungo in a social activity by the primitives. This becomes clear from the words of Barfield who writes: "'Participation' begins by being an activity, and essentially a communal or social activity. It takes place in rites and initiation ceremonies resulting in 'collective mental states of extreme emotional intensity. . . .'"[19]

Critics have noted fertility connotations in celebrations after the lifting of Mummah by Henderson. From here starts what has been called a rebirth of Henderson. R. Detweiler writes that "The novel focuses consistently and from many angles upon the single concept of rebirth, and that concept in turn provides the vehicle for the redemption theme."[20]

Dahfu, through more and more intimate dialogue with Henderson, saw through his problem. What must be shed in the process of Henderson's re-birth is his ego and his fear, both of which were the result of his feeling separated from the universe. Dahfu realized

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[18]Ibid., p. 30.

[19]Ibid., p. 32.

[20]R. Detweiler, "Patterns of Rebirth in Henderson the Rain King," Modern Fiction Studies, 12, No. 4 (Winter 1966-1967), 405.

that Henderson had to be given a practical lesson in coming out of himself. "I intend to loosen you up, Sungo," he told Henderson, "because you are so contracted. This is why we were running. The tendency of your conscious is to isolate self. This makes you extremely contracted and self-recoiled. . . ." (264).

The remedy Dahfu came up with was to persuade, almost compel Henderson to face Atti, the lioness. This could be done if Henderson was literally made to feel like a lion. Dahfu told him: "Minus yourself of some of your heavy reluctance of attitude. Why so sad and so earthen? Now you are a lion. Mentally, conceive of the environment. The sky, the sun, and creatures of the bush. You are related to all. The very gnats are your cousins. The sky is your thoughts" (266). Dahfu compelled him to growl and roar like a lion, so that he could feel like a lion. "Feel it, be the beast" (267). Dahfu made it clear that it was our conception that created reality for us: "For as conception is, so the fellow is. Put differently, you are in the flesh as your soul is. And in the manner described a fellow really is the artist of himself" (268). This is again almost the same thing as explained by Barfield about man and his share in the creation of representations. He writes that "the two important things to remember about perception are these: first, that we must not confuse the percept with its cause. I do not hear undulating molecules of air; the name of what I hear is sound. . . . Secondly, I do not perceive any thing with my sense-organs alone, but with a great part of my whole being."[21]

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[21]Barfield, p. 20.

Atti, the lioness kept by Dahfu, was a symbol of reality, the kind of reality which Henderson had been trying to avoid all his life. If Henderson wanted to face reality, he must face her. Once he faced Atti, he couldn't avoid her. He would be cured of the disease of avoiding reality. "Test it, and you will find she is unavoidable. And this is what you need, as you are an avoider. Oh, you have accomplished momentous avoidances. But she will change that. She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you. She will force the present moment upon you. Second, lions are experiencers. But not in haste. They experience with deliberate luxury" (260).

Dahfu had great influence upon Henderson, but the final change in him was brought about by Gmilo, the lion. Henderson accompanied Dahfu on his mission to kill Gmilo, the killing being required by the tribal tradition as a condition for Dahfu's continuing to be king. Dahfu and Henderson encountered the lion face to face. On the significance of that encounter, Markos writes: "Waiting with Dahfu, Henderson is forced into a full realization of the reality of death and savagery which belong to the natural world of which man is a part."[22] Henderson himself says that the face-to-face confrontation with the lion brought him to "the very doors of consciousness. . . ." (306). And the "thought added itself that this was all mankind needed, to be conditioned into the image of a ferocious animal like the one below" (307). The lion, with his fearlessness, thus, becomes an

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[22]Markos, p. 201.

ideal example for man to follow if he wants to live and accept reality without fear. "Because," says Opdahl," the lion is at home in the world, because it 'does not take issue with the inherent. Is one hundred per cent within the given,' it exemplifies an acceptance of death which Henderson must emulate."[23] R. Detweiler too stresses this point when he says that "one discovers in the novel a fundamental animal imagery that reveals the hero's gradual transformation from a lower into a higher creature, a kind of analogical chain-of-being progression from a pig-like to a lion-like nature."[24]

The lesson went home to Henderson. Till now, he confessed, ". . . I had boasted to my dear Lily how I loved reality. . . . But oh, unreality. Unreality, unreality. That has been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head" (207). Henderson now admired the lion as Blake did the tiger who, in the opinion of J. H. Wicksteed, "is a spiritual expression of the Creator himself."[25]

Henderson too, like the lion, must accept life, feel at home in the world. "How can you chide it?" Henderson now asked, adding the understood, "It has a right to our respect. It does its stuff, that's all" (318). He realized that this acceptance of life, of reality,

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[23]Opdahl, p. 132.

[24]Detweiler, pp. 405-406.

[25]See M. D. Paley, Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought (Oxford, 1970), p. 39.

was what his inner voice had always cried for: "It wanted reality. How much unreality could it stand?" (318).[26]

In the last pages of Henderson the Rain King, we see Henderson flying back to America. He is trying, through continuous reflection, to understand in greater depth, clarity and detail, what he has learnt about life and death. A remarkable change in his attitude towards his surroundings is already visible. He has become extremely confident but remains at the same time extremely humble, and his concern transcends his own self. He had gone through a hard struggle to find his true self, and now he wishes that others may not be required to go through it: "What I'd like to know is why this has to be fought by everybody, for there is nothing that's struggled against so hard as coming-to" (328).

Henderson's condition now is the reverse of what it was before: he has moved from doubt to faith, from self-consciousness towards a

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[26]It is interesting to see that for Bellow, the lion seems to have become a consistent symbol of the ideal way of living life and facing death. In his latest novel, Humboldt's Gift, the protagonist, Charles Citrine, receives the following poem from his deceased friend Humboldt whose awareness of life and reality had always fascinated him:

> Mice hide when hawks are high;
> Hawks shine from airplanes;
> Planes dread the ack-ack-ack;
> Each one fears somebody.
> Only the heedless lions
> Under the booloo tree
> Snooze in each other's arms
> After their lunch of blood--
> I call that living good.

Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 111.

concern for others, from rejection of life to acceptance of it. Through the symbolic prophet Dahfu, writes Galloway, "Henderson enters a new world of the self, and after becoming naked at the Wariri he is reclothed in Rome."[27] Earlier when his daughter had brought home an abandoned baby, he had persuaded her to give the baby away to authorities. Now, reflecting on that event, he says, "I feel I committed an offense against my daughter by parting her from this infant" (37). He himself picks up an orphan in the aeroplane and fathers him during the flight. Before going to Africa, he was himself like the abandoned baby; now, his concern and relationship extend towards everything, everybody. He is now a part of the rhythm of the universe. "Oh, you can't get away from rhythm," he tells his companion-guide Romilayu," you just can't get away from it. . . . You've got to live at peace with it, because if it's going to worry you, you'll lose. You can't win against it" (329).

The questioning, the doubting and dividing intelligence in Henderson is erased, and he has achieved a state of existence that Barfield calls "a certain humble, tender receptiveness of heart which is nourished by a deep and deepening imagination and by the self-knowledge which that inevitably involves." Barfield refers to Blake, saying "Perhaps this is what Blake had in mind, when he called Imagination 'the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever. . . .'"[28] In the novel, when Dahfu asks him, referring to Descartes,

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[27]D. D. Galloway, p. 252.

[28]Barfield, p. 163.

"Do you agree with the fellow's preposition that the animal is a soulless machine?" or "Do you think that Jesus Christ is still a source of human types, Henderson, as a model-force?" (303), the suggested answer is an affirmation of Jesus Christ as a model for man in his relationship to the world around him. It is also important here to note that Henderson calls the primitive Romilayu "a Christian" more than once. There is a very peculiar note referring to Christ as relating with all surrounding him. Christ's concern for all, his acceptance of reality, is thus indicated both by Barfield and Bellow as being to some extent the result of 'participation'.

Barfield distinguishes between 'original participation' and 'final participation' when he writes: "Original participation fires the heart from a source outside itself; the image enlivens the heart. But in final participation--since the death and resurrection--the heart is fired from within by the Christ; and it is for the heart to enliven the images."[29]

The change in Henderson makes the point clear. If he ever had any original participation, it was in the childhood when he observed "The sun flames and swell; the heat it emits is its love too" (283). This is, however, from a sudden flash of his memory; otherwise, we see him without a trace of original participation. But through his education by Dahfu, he has achieved some degree of "final participation" that helps him attain a spiritual awakening, and an answer to his inner need. Dahfu tells him: "Imagination is a force of nature.

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[29]Ibid., p. 172.

. . . It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems. . . . What Homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to" (271). Dahfu's way, thus, is to bring a conscious self-transformation in Henderson. This would lead to what Barfield calls "final participation."

Barfield calls "final participation" the "Proper goal of imagination,"[30] and through the use of imagination man creates the sense of reality he had lost due to his bringing up in a scientific environment. It is because in this kind of participation, the fact of man's relation with the phenomena is first intellectually understood and then applied in real life, so that the mere appearances or idols with which modern man did not feel related are now accepted and even loved, not for their own sake, but in their relation to ourselves. Man thus "creates" this "participation."

Henderson understands this situation very well now; he knows that a conscious effort has to be made by man to regain the unified picture of the universe which was given to the primitive man by his natural, inborn, original participation. As he writes to his wife Lily: "Humankind has to sway itself more intentionally toward beauty" (282). He is saying the same thing again, though in different words when he ends the letter: "And moreover, it's love that makes reality reality. The opposite makes the opposite" (286).

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[30]Barfield, p. 147.

Barfield says clearly that there is no need for modern man to try to achieve "original participation" or to return to nature like the primitives. The lesson Henderson learns from Dahfu's death in the jungle is the same. As Markos writes: "The point of the novel is that one must return from Africa."[31] He rightly explains that "The symbolic significance of Dahfu's death may be that it is dangerous for man to regress too far back into nature."[32] The best solution for modern man is "final participation," i.e., relating with the outside reality through imagination.

The conscious use of imagination is related to another recurrent metaphor concerning the spiritual growth of man as presented in this novel. Henderson is from the beginning haunted by Daniel's prophecy in the Bible: "They shall drive thee from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field" (21). Returning from war, disgusted with life, Henderson had started raising pigs. When his first wife, Frances, showed disliking for it, he told her, "You'd better not hurt any of them, . . . Those animals have become a part of me" (21). At that time, however, it was said only as a threat, as an excuse for insistence of the self. Later, in Africa, he came across Arnewi people who "were very sensitive to the condition of their cattle, whom they regarded as their relatives, more or less, and not as domestic animals" (47-48). Following this, he is acquainted with

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[31]Markos, p. 204.

[32]Ibid., p. 202.

Atti and he is asked to identify himself with the lioness. What he learns out of these experiences is that he has to come out of himself and relate with the world around him, starting probably with the animals. Continuing the metaphor, Bellow makes Henderson carry the cub along with him to America. The cub is a living Dahfu for him. Imagination has overcome distance, time and death. Now that, through imagination, Henderson is consciously "participating" in the external phenomena, he is reminded of an old, boyhood experience with a bear, and he is made aware of the real significance of that incident: Henderson, sixteen years old at that time, had left home and was working in team with a bear called Smolak to provide entertainment to people in a park in Canada. He remembers:

> And while we climbed and dipped and swooped and swerved and rose again higher than the Ferris wheels and fell, we held on to each other. By a common bond of despair we embraced, cheek to cheek, as all support seemed to leave us and we started down the perpendicular drop. I was pressed into his long-suffering, age-worn, tragic, and discolored coat as he grunted and cried to me. At times the animal would wet himself. But he was apparently aware I was his friend and he did not claw me. . . . I said to Hanson, as I recall, "We're two of a kind. Smolak was cast off and I am an Ishmael, too" (338).

Then Henderson draws a conclusion that is very close to Barfield's concept of participation. Henderson says: "So if corporeal things are an image of the spiritual and visible objects are renderings of invisible ones, and if Smolak and I were outcasts together, two humorists before the crowd, but brothers in our souls--I embeared by him, and he probably humanized by me--I didn't come to the pigs as a tabula rasa. . . . Something deep already was inscribed on me" (338-339).

This mingling, this uniting and relating with the phenomena is now enjoyed by Henderson with full awareness, when he along with the child picked up by him in the airplane, comes out into the fresh air at Newfoundland airport (the place chosen by Bellow to bring Henderson to is important for the symbolic suggestion of its name): "I held him close to my chest. He didn't seem to be afraid that I would fall with him. While to me he was like medicine applied, and the air, too; it also was a remedy. Plus the happiness I expected at Idlewild from meeting Lily. And the lion? He was in it, too" (340). Henderson indeed is in a land that has become new for him.

Henderson is happy inwardly and outwardly because he now feels at home in the universe. His case proves the truth of the following words of R. Durr taken from his essay on imagination in which his concept of imagination is also the same as in Blake or Goethe, who are quoted by both Durr and Barfield. Durr says that "subject and object, mind and thing, man and nature are, in reality, inseparable, the two terminals of a single imaginative act."[33] Henderson achieves his salvation by learning just that.

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[33]R. A. Durr, Poetic Vision and the Psychedelic Experience (Syracuse University Press, 1970), p. 29.

CHAPTER THREE

I

Humboldt's Gift is the third and last novel to be studied in this thesis. It is also Bellow's latest novel. It is my intention to show that in this novel the typical Bellow protagonist makes a further leap towards an understanding of his peculiar dilemma as an individual in the modern times, and that in his eagerness to relate with the spiritual world he has to transcend his commitment to society and nature. In the process, the issues that were at the centre of the two novels discussed earlier in this study have been re-emphasized with a freshness of approach. Like Joseph of Dangling Man, Charles Citrine of Humboldt's Gift is aware of the corrupt lives of most people who surround him, but, concerned with larger spiritual questions, Citrine's relations with people are not the greatest challenge for him. He relates with them and to a certain extent is sentimentally attached to them. But in order to pursue his interest in matters relating to the soul, its existence and its immortality, he is eager to minimise his involvement with people and worldly affairs.

In Henderson the Rain King, Henderson, who suffered from an inability to relate with the external phenomena and therefore found life utterly meaningless, learns from African primitives that the subject and the object combine through the subject's imagination to create the reality. This lesson ends his feeling of isolation and

makes him feel at home in the world. Charles Citrine in Humboldt's Gift understands what Henderson has to learn, but he is tormented because he is surrounded by people who are Machiavellians, out to exploit him and his love for their own worldly gains. He is sorry for their narrow, single vision of life and struggles hard to make them understand that the object reality of this world is temporary and false and that they should also look for the permanent values that lie with the soul.

In Citrine, the feeling against the materialistic world is all the more strong because his one-time friend and mentor, the poet Humboldt, had died tragically, a victim to what Joseph in Dangling Man had called the hard-boileddom of modern society. From his own experiences with the world, Citrine realizes, rather ruefully, that it is no good for an individual to try to change the values of other people. It is better to concentrate upon one's own efforts to make contact with one's soul and to know its immortal nature, so that one may be able to go through this world bearing its trivialities and challenges, and die in peace, knowing that one is advancing toward the immortal world of spirit which is his soul's real home.

Citrine decides to do it scientifically, following the course of self-discipline and meditation laid down in the book, Knowledge of the Higher Worlds, by the anthroposophist Rudolph Steiner who is known as the scientist of the spirit. In an interview published in Newsweek, Bellow makes it clear that Citrine's involvement with Steiner's work is to be taken as a serious development in his character. "Spiritual science," writes Steiner, "gives the means of developing the spiritual

ears and eyes, and kindling the spiritual light. . . ."[1] The course for spiritual knowledge as described by Steiner does not ask for rejection of the world; it however demands an absolute detachment from the world while living in this world. Citrine has to go a long way struggling against self-doubt and his emotional attachment with people, before he can finally live in and yet transcend the world in order to give himself to a scientific search of the soul. In this transcendence of the world to which he has been strongly attached, lies the "further leap" mentioned above.

II

Von Humboldt Fleisher came to be known to Charles Citrine, as to the rest of the world, with the publication of his book Harlequin Ballads in the Thirties. To a world waking up from the nightmare of depression, Humboldt came as an inspiration for the creation of a new world of ideal beauty and peace. "Humboldt was just what everyone had been waiting for."[2] His ballads became an instant rage because they were "pure, musical, witty, radiant, humane. I think they were Platonic. By Platonic I refer to an original perfection to which all human beings long to return" (11). Humboldt was a visionary, and he wanted to drape the world in radiance. "This mission or vocation,"

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[1]Rudolph Steiner, Knowledge of the Higher Worlds (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1923), p. 28.

[2]Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 1. All further references to this book are from this edition and page numbers are given parenthetically following the quotes.

writes Citrine," was reflected in his face. The hope of new beauty. The promise, the secret of beauty" (17).

In his physical appearance and expression, Humboldt gave the impression of being an elemental force: "A surfaced whale beside your boat might look at you as he looked with his wide-set gray eyes" (11). Like Spinoza of whom he talked to Citrine frequently, "his mind was fed with joy by things eternal and infinite" (14). Humboldt had the imagination of a Blake. Citrine writes that Humboldt in those days "was all earth, trees, flowers, oranges, the sun, Paradise, Atlantis, Rhadamanthus. He talked about William Blake at Felpham and Milton's Eden, and he ran down the city" (17). His own condition was like Traherne's infant still possessed of the heavenly Felicity. Like Plato, who along with Blake, Traherne, Spinoza, Hegel, etc., was the subject of his talks, Humboldt believed in an original world from which man had descended into this world. "One of Humboldt's themes was the perennial human feeling that there was an original world, a home-world, which was lost. . . . He spoke of our species as castaways" (24).

Humboldt's tragedy, as related in pieces by Citrine, was that he took upon himself the task of changing the whole course of life in America, of showing the castaways the path to Home, or perhaps of bringing Home to them. How would he do it? Through poetry: "Sometimes he spoke of Poetry as the merciful Ellis Island where a host of aliens began their naturalization and of this planet as a thrilling but insufficiently humanized imitation of that home-world" (24).

Humboldt did not want to keep to himself what he had. "He wanted with all his heart to give us something exquisite and delicate. He put a heavy demand on himself" (324-325). His enthusiasm to bring beauty and delight to the withering lives of other Americans went too far. He was one of those who suffered through "exceeding their natural limits curiously" (119). From his wide-spread, all-embracing readings, he knew America inside out. But his wild enthusiasm had blinded him to the destructive force of the industrial and materialistic America. His face clearly showed that he understood what was to be done. "A world of categories devoid of spirit waits for life to return. Humboldt was supposed to be an instrument of this revival" (17).

Humboldt failed utterly in his mission. He did influence a few individuals here and there--like Citrine: "Humboldt revealed to me new ways of doing things. I was ecstatic" (1). But he proved too naive as far as his hopes about changing America were concerned. "So all his thinking, writing, feeling counted for nothing, all the raids behind the lines to bring back beauty had no effect except to wear him out. He dropped dead in a dismal hotel off Times Square" (5). Citrine keeps talking of the sad irony of Humboldt's failure: "A wonderful man like my late friend Humboldt was overawed by rational orthodoxy, and because he was a poet this probably cost him his life. Isn't it enough to be a poor naked forked creature without also being a poor naked forked spirit? Must the imagination be asked to give up its own full and free connection with the universe--the universe as Goethe spoke of it? As the living garment of God?" (363).

All through the novel, Citrine is trying to work out, through intellectual analysis, meditational concentration based on Steiner's instructions, or emotional outbursts, the full reality of Humboldt's life. He is trying to understand himself and to formulate the outlines of his own future life. "So I, Citrine," says the narrator-hero of the novel," comfortable, in the midst of life, . . . reconstructed the way in which my stout inspired pal declined and fell. His talent had gone bad. And now I had to think what to do about talent in this day, in this age. How to prevent the leprosy of souls. Somehow it appeared to be up to me" (136). The way Humboldt had lived and the way he had died is of great importance to Citrine in deciding his own aims and ambitions in life.

Humboldt's education had been intellectual and rationalistic. He was aware of all the philosophical thought from the earliest times to the present. The concepts that most influenced him were Plato's myth of Er, Hegel's World Historical Individual, Proust on Combray, Virgil on farming, Marvell on gardens, and Wallace Stevens' Caribbean poetry. At the same time he had a vision of turning America into a land of eternal beauty and delight through the use of imagination. Imagination was at the centre of his program. Through it people could live life as poets did. He wanted to find "the common ground of poetry and science, to prove that the imagination was just as potent as machinery. . . ." (119). He saw himself as the leader of the movement of renewal of life through imagination, and in order to make the program effective he acted like a dictator over his wife Kathleen and friends like Charles Citrine. Humboldt's enthusiasm and

energy for this movement were so great that they made him a maniac when he found resistence to his program. The materialistic America appreciated its poets, but could not afford to take them seriously:

> Maybe America didn't need art and inner miracles. It had so many outer ones. The USA was a big operation, very big. The more it, the less we. So Humboldt behaved like an eccentric and a comic subject. But occasionally there was a break in his eccentricity when he stopped and thought. He tried to think himself clear away from this American world (I did that, too). I could see that Humboldt was pondering what to do between then and now, between birth and death, to satisfy certain great questions. Such brooding didn't make him any saner. He tried drugs and drink. Finally, many courses of shock treatment had to be administered. It was, as he saw it, Humboldt versus madness. Madness was a whole lot stronger (6).

Not only the existing way of American life proved too ruthlessly powerful and resistant to the spiritual aspirations of Humboldt, it was also a case of aiming higher than one's reach. For, after that first book of ballads Humboldt's literary talent declined, and gradually he was forced to become obscure and forgotten. Thus ignored, Humboldt pushed himself harder, forced himself on others, only hastening his own life on the path to desperation and ruin. It was as if he had come to Earth with a deliberate object in mind, to force people out of their sordid materialistic life at any cost to himself. He was out to use any means to accomplish his end. First he had hopes in the victory of Stevenson over Eisenhower in the presidential elections of the Fifties. Stevenson, Humboldt believed, stood for poetry, for imagination. When Stevenson was defeated, Humboldt grew passionate for money, because money brought the power needed to change the world. His whole drive against materialism thus became self-contradictory and self-defeating. Towards the end of his life when Humboldt regained

his sanity and wit, he himself understood this ironically tragic fate of the artist in America:

> To the high types of Martyrdom the twentieth century has added the farcical martyr. This, you see, is the artist. By wishing to play a great role in the fate of mankind he becomes a bum and a joke. A double punishment is inflicted on him as the would-be representative of meaning and beauty (345-346).

In his last letter to Citrine, Humboldt confessed that he had been defeated in his mission:

> But during these last years I haven't been able to even read poetry, much less write it. Opening the Phaedrus a few months ago, I just couldn't do it. I broke down. My gears are stripped. My lining is shot. It is all shattered. I didn't have the strength to bear Plato's beautiful words, and started to cry. The original, fresh self isn't there any more (340).

Citrine always had the highest regard for Humboldt. He understood, pitied and loved him for what he was. "As for Humboldt," he writes, "he had some nobility even when he was crazy. Even then he was constant to some very big things indeed. . . . The man loved art deeply. We loved him for it. Even when the decay was raging there were incorruptible places in Humboldt that were not rotted out" (240).

Citrine does not himself want to be a martyr to the materialistic America. He understands its might and knows that to cope with it, worldly power itself is needed. If until now he has been comparatively able to avoid suffering from a confrontation with the world, it is because of his own money and name. "These were very tough guys. I had their attention because of my worldly goods. Otherwise I would already have been behind the steel meshes of the county jail" (232).

While worldly success helped Citrine get along with the world, it also erected a wall between him and Humboldt:

> In the early Fifties I myself became famous. I even made a pile of money. Ah, money, the money. Humboldt held the money against me. In the last years of his life when he wasn't too depressed to talk, wasn't locked up in a loony bin, he went about New York saying bitter things about me and my 'million dollars' (2).

When Citrine's play, Von Trenck, achieved success at the Belasco theatre, Humboldt along with some other friends picketed there and called Citrine a traitor. The climax of Citrine's separation from Humboldt came when Citrine, coming across the poor and rejected Humboldt in a New York street, deliberately avoided meeting him and left him alone and dying. The memory of that incident has ever haunted him and made him feel guilty about his success: "And at that time he was a fiery Failure and I was a newborn success. Success baffled me. It filled me with guilt and shame" (51).

The real reason for Citrine's guilt was that he had earned money because he had yielded to the conditions necessary for worldly success. He had made compromises. "The play performed nightly at the Belasco was not the play I had written. I had only provided a bolt of material from which the director had cut shaped basted and sewn hiw own Von Trenck. Brooding, I muttered to myself that after all Broadway adjoins the garmẽt district and blends with it" (51).

After Humboldt's death, Citrine continues to live an apparently worldly life. He divorces his wife Denise and is attached to a very sensual girl, Renata. But Humboldt's death was a knock at his conscience that keeps his whole emotional and mental frame vibrating. It makes him frequently indulge in self-satire: "So my pal Humboldt

was gone. Probably his very bones had crumbled in potter's field. Perhaps there was nothing in his grave but a few lumps of soot. But Charlie Citrine was still outspeeding passionate criminals in the streets of Chicago, and Charlie Citrine was in terrific shape and lay beside a voluptuous friend" (8).

Citrine is a worldly success, but he is sharply aware of the passing nature of earthly life in general, and of the greedy, corrupt lives of most people he has contact with. The peculiarity of his character is that in spite of his knowledge of corrupt lives of people, he is sentimentally attached to them. His own money is not very important to him. It all came to him unsought: "But such sums as I made, made themselves. Capitalism made them for dark comical reasons of its own. The world did it" (3).

In the earlier novel, Henderson too, while looking for a Biblical sentence about forgiveness, only finds money in books of his father's library. Allan Guttmann's remark about him also suits Citrine. He wrote: "Seeking wisdom and finding only money, Henderson is the ironic hero of an age of affluence."[3]

What money did to Citrine, however, was that it took him away from the direction he was going or wanted to go since his childhood: "And money wasn't what I had in mind. Oh God, no, what I wanted was to do good. I was dying to do something good. And this feeling for good went back to my early and peculiar sense of existence. . . ." (3).

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[3]Allen Guttmann, "Bellow's Henderson," Critique, 7, No. 3 (Spring-Summer 1965), 34.

Like Joseph and Henderson, Citrine remembers the early, pure days of childhood when everything was seen through the medium of love and delight. He nostalgically thinks of his first love with Naomi Lutz--a love so pure and deep that it made the thought of death insignificant. He remembers how he had left for New York to meet Humboldt the first time and how it had filled him with ectasy when his inner self discovered a match in the outside: "Trees were budding. It was like Beethoven's Pastorale. I felt showered by the green, within" (2). Then came years with Humboldt that brought to an end the innocent, love-filled days of childhood, replaced by a new enthusiasm for and glorification of art and poetry, imagination and intellect. This in turn subsided to give way to material success that brought money and fame. Now when Humboldt is dead, and success has lost whatever charm and attraction it initially had for Citrine, he finds himself eager for discovering values that are lasting and permanent. He writes:

> And last spring, almost an elderly fellow now, I found that I had left the sidewalk and that I was following the curb and looking. For what? What was I doing? Suppose I found a dime? Suppose I found a fifty-cent piece? What then? I don't know how the child's soul had gotten back, but it was back. Everything was melting. Ice, discretion, maturity. What would Humboldt have said to this? (3).

The child's soul in him craves a world of eternal beauty and permanence. The need and anxiety to quest for the spiritual world is increased by the increasing pressure of the world on him. Citrine finds himself "sunk in the glassy depths of life and groping, thrillingly and desperately, for sense, a person keenly aware of painted

veils, of Maya, of domes of many colored glass staining the white radiance of eternity. . . ." (3).

Citrine understands the problem and the difficulty of fighting it. The love of the modern man for the objective reality has become so strong that it is becoming increasingly difficult to change it: "I rejected the plastered idols of the Appearances. These idols I had been trained, along with everybody else, to see, and I was tired of their tyranny. . . . We crave more than ever the radiant vividness of boundless love, and more and more the barren idols thwart this" (16-17).

I. Malin rightly emphasizes the theme of Moha in Bellow's work. He says that Bellow "sees an 'eternal' opposition of Moha to the spirit."[4] The theme of Moha (the Sanskrit word meaning simply the love of Maya, of the finite earthly values)[5] continues in Humboldt's Gift too. Citrine's spirit does not have any conflict with Moha, but living in the world he has to deal with people who have strong Moha. Citrine's difficulty is that he cannot easily dissociate himself from these people. Though he is not like them, yet he has sentimental attachment with them. By talk and argument, he tries to change them, but without success. They do not understand him.

Ironically, while Citrine's own love of the idols and Appearances is decreasing fast, he shows more and more agitation in his mind, and

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[4] I. Malin, pp. 10-11.

[5] Moha is defined as "Delusion of mind which prevents one from discovering the truth (makes one believe in the reality of worldly objects), and to be addicted to the gratification of sensual pleasures," in The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Delhi, Varanasi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1973), p. 449.

makes increasing effort at spiritual awareness. He is already consulting an anthroposophist, Dr. Sheldt, who is instructing him on the path of the knowledge of higher worlds as taught by Rudolph Steiner. The temptation against spirituality is still very near Citrine. Dr. Sheldt's daughter has been trying to seduce him away from her father's teachings. This further leads Citrine to decide that it is difficult to concentrate on spiritual matters while living so near and surrounded by worldly temptations. Apart from this, the agitation felt by Citrine is now caused mainly by an awareness of the rest of the world's obsession with the temporary and temporal side of life and its total neglect of the spiritual reality and the immortal soul. Citrine's instinct, his inner voice, revolts against yielding to the finite. Following Rudolph Steiner, Citrine is consciously trying to exercise self-control and self-discipline; he meditates on the lines suggested by Steiner. Sincerity and patience are two of the many pre-requisites mentioned by Steiner that Citrine is trying to develop in his character.

Meanwhile he is involved in disputes caused by his former wife Denise, an underworld character named Cantabile, income tax authorities, and others. Often he is able to deal with them quite passively, with a calmness that he attributes to the practice of Steiner's instructions by him. Steiner writes in the book which Citrine is trying to follow: "A particular effort must be made to cultivate the quality of patience. Every symptom of impatience produces a paralysing, even a destructive effect on the higher faculties that slumber

in us."[6] Similarly there are other instructions for developing self-discipline and detachment from the world. He writes: "Other qualities which, like anger and vexation, have to be combated, are timidity, superstition, prejudice, vanity and ambition, curiosity, the mania of imparting information and the making of distinctions in human beings according to the outward characteristics of rank, sex, race and so forth."[7]

Citrine gets along with people with patience and modesty, but he finds it difficult to stop analyzing the problems from which his countrymen are suffering. One of these is the problem of boredom on which Citrine plans to write an essay. It was to write this essay that he had come to Chicago from New York. He actually formulated ideas on the subject. He gives two main reasons for the reign of boredom in the modern society. As we shall see, these two reasons are the same factors from which Henderson and Joseph in the earlier novels suffered. The first is "The lack of a personal connection with the external world" (202). Henderson's inner voice too had called for establishing a personal connection with the external phenomena. In the absence of it, the world looks boring and disenchanted. "But it is not the world, it is my own head that is disenchanted" (203). Through imagination, Citrine reminds us, man can re-establish the personal link that he lost with the coming of the scientific age, because imagination builds a link between the subject and the elements.

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[6] R. Steiner, p. 81.

[7] R. Steiner, p. 86.

The second reason for the prevalence of boredom, according to Citrine, is the self-centredness of modern man:

> For me the self-conscious ego is the seat of boredom. . . . You have a great organized movement of life, and you have the single self, independently conscious, proud of its detachment and its absolute immunity, its stability and its power to remain unaffected by anything whatsoever--by the suffering of others or by society or by politics or by external chaos. In a way it doesn't give a damn. It is asked to give a damn, and we often urge it to give a damn but the curse of noncaring lies upon this painfully free consciousness. It is free from attachment to beliefs and to other souls. . . . For to be fully conscious of oneself as an individual is also to be separated from all else (203).

This kind of separation was exactly what Joseph suffered from.

Citrine is surrounded by people who have a strong ego, who are selfish and greedy and whose life is limited to the pursuit of appearances. Citrine himself is largely free from such limitations, but indirectly, he is involved because people around him are involved. Yet, his aspirations for achieving an awakening of the spirit remain firm in him. Whenever time and circumstances allow, he momentarily withdraws into himself: "But on the court of my dreams," says he, "I was a tiger. So in dreams of pure wakefulness and forward intensity I overcame my inertia, my mooning and muddiness. In dreams at any rate I had no intention of quitting" (295). He knows his weaknesses and analyzes them at length in order to get rid of them:

> But this calls for unusual strength of soul. The more so since society claims more and more of your inner self and infects you with its restlessness. It trains you in distraction, colonizes consciousness as far as consciousness advances. . . . Evidently I didn't have what it took. What it took was more strength, more courage, more stature. America is an overwhelming phenomena, of course (306).

Humboldt had been defeated by America. Citrine is worried about himself. So he wants to stop his involvement with the world: "The temptation to lie down is very great," he tells Renata (312). At the same time, he feels a moral commitment with the world. The novel is an account of Citrine's attempt to "lie down," to detach himself from the world ~~of~~ in realization of higher worlds of spirit.

Citrine does not hate the world. He is simply becoming increasingly aware of the temporariness of life on earth and of life's continuity after death. Yet he cannot concentrate on his meditations until he is fully convinced that it is possible to make contact with the eternal world of the soul. Steiner lays down the condition that a complete faith in the effectiveness of the occult is necessary. A doubtful mind lacking reverence cannot hope to achieve much. Secondly, Citrine is sentimentally attached to those who, like his brother Julius, represent purely materialistic values. Shulman rightly points out the presence of "the powerful, financially successful brothers or fathers in Bellow's fiction who testify that the protagonist is both related and in tension with his society."[8] This is much more true of Citrine and his materialistic brother than of any other Bellow protagonist. Citrine is attached to even those who he knows are trying to exploit him. His interest in spiritual development makes him tolerant of them. There is a whole train of those who are either already exploiting him, or are eager to use his name for personal gains. There is his former wife Denise who is ruining him in

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[8]Shulman, "The Style of Bellow's Comedies," p. 113.

law-suits; when her lawyers and the judge harrass him in the court, he doesn't feel too angry. "Anthroposophy," he says, "was having definite effects. I couldn't take any of this too hard. Otherworldliness tinged it all and every little while my spirit seemed to dissociate itself" (231).

Renata, his present mistress, is a sensual girl who virtually lives on his expenses and persuades him to marry her. His personal friends are no better. Thaxter maintains his high standard of cultured and aristocratic life partly at Citrine's cost. His lawyer friend, George Swiebel, pushes Citrine into more complicated and expensive law-suits. The height of Citrine's hesitant and yet compulsive acceptance of society is shown in the incident with Cantabile who is a complete bully. Cantabile first cheats Citrine at a poker game at George Swiebel's home, then gets his expensive Mercedez car battered out of recognition, following which he harrasses him a full day. He is greed and arrogance personified. But Citrine has more than patience with him: "As soon as I saw Rinaldo Cantabile at George Swiebel's kitchen table I was aware that a natural connection existed between us" (91). Citrine lets him bully and threaten him, posing complete passivity. But, writes Citrine, "Cantabile may have believed that he was abusing a passive man. Not at all. I was a man active elsewhere" (89). The apparent passivity of manners and responses parallels Steiner's instructions: "Noiseless and unnoticed by the outer world is the treading of the path of knowledge. . . .

The transformation goes on only in the part of the soul--hidden from outward sight."[9]

But in regard to Cantabile, Citrine is passive only until Cantabile wants to help his wife complete her doctoral thesis on Humboldt. The memory of Humboldt is a sensitive point for Citrine and he won't allow his name to be used by a pretending scholar for her personal gains. He tells Cantabile: "'This poor Humboldt, my friend, was a big spirit who was destroyed . . . never mind that. The PhD racket is a very fine racket but I want no part of it.'" (106).

Another bit of Steiner's advice is: "Provide for yourself moments of inner tranquillity, and learn, in these moments, to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential."[10] This again is parallel to what Citrine has been doing, and he needs to do so because of his rather strong connections with the world that he at the same time considers transient and only a preparing ground for the real life of the soul that is to come after death. His periods of introspection do help him, slowly but surely, to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential in the world.

At this point he receives the letter written to him by Humboldt just before his death about a decade before. The letter had been written with a perspective that Humboldt had gained only in the last days of his life. He advises Citrine: "Don't get frenzied about money. Overcome your greed." In the letter, Humboldt has given the

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[9]R. Steiner, p. 10.

[10]R. Steiner, p. 16.

outlines of a film plot conceived by him. It is the story of a creative man who ultimately suffers loneliness and rejection because he made compromises with his conscience for the sake of worldly success. Then Humboldt adds: "You will make a good script of this outline if you will remember me as I kept remembering you in plotting this out. . . . I have borrowed from you to create this Corcoran." Humboldt is warning Citrine against following materialistic interests. He must not repeat the mistake of Humboldt. He must choose the life of imagination and spirit. "Before you sit down to work at this scenario play a few sides of The Magic Flute on the phonograph, or read The Tempest, or E. T. A. Hoffman" (346-347).

Citrine is greatly moved by the letter. It helps him a lot in understanding himself. He is again reminded of his real aims in life. But it is not enough to help him resolve his uncertain relationship with Renata.

Citrine's attachment with Renata is very strong. Renata, who is sensuality personified, becomes a symbol of earthly and worldly life. She has definite influence upon Citrine; she makes him buy his big sophisticated car, compels him to dress fashionably, insists upon staying in the best suite of the hotel when they go to New York. When he refuses to accompany her to see the film Deep Throat, she punishes him by carrying away one of his shoes while he sits in the restaurant.

But Renata is not just a distraction in his spiritual life. Unsure of his ultimate program and commitment, he finds in her a constant support for an earthly life. She guards him from the attacks of others who are purely materialistic; she gives him the best the earth

offers--beauty and passion. Citrine's sentimental attachment with the world is reflected in his attachment with Renata.

With her great charm and sexual attraction, Renata keeps trying to persuade Citrine to marry her. He too is strongly dependent upon her: "I too was trying. Yes, I longed to make it with Renata. She was helping me to consummate my earthly cycle" (193). But Citrine is never sure how constant she would be; he remains hesitant for a long time "because, thinking of her as wife-material, I had to ask myself where she had learned all this and whether she had taken the PhD once and for all" (193). Renata, representing the earthly, temporal life, does abandon him when in a moment of despair, he decides to marry her. Significantly, she marries an undertaker. The finite world that she represents is well-matched with what her husband deals in--the product of death, the dead-bodies.

Her departure is bitter to Citrine, but as she explains in her letter, it is for his good in the long run. It removes the contradiction in his aims, the conflict between his attachment for the world and his aspirations for a re-union with the soul. She writes: "'Your passion for Von Humboldt Fleisher speeded the deterioration of our relationship.'" (432). She refers to his obsession with the spirit and asks: "'If you think you're on earth for such a very special purpose I don't know why you cling to the idea of happines-with a woman or a happy family life?'" (432). Citrine understands Renata's point of view and takes the hint: "She was right, of course. In taking up with her I had asked for trouble. Why? Maybe the purpose of such trouble was to turn me deeper into realms of peculiar

but necessary thought" (433). He had thought in the same positive way about the trouble caused him by others like Cantabile: "But it was just possible that Cantabile's death-dealing fantasy, his imaginary role as Death's highest-ranking deputy, was intended also to wake me up. . . ." (296). He thinks that it was perhaps necessary to lead him on the desired path. Renata and Cantabile were only agents acting to serve in a larger plan conceived in the higher worlds.

After this Citrine decides to stop depending on intellectual analysis of the worldly happenings. The strangeness of life, its mystery, above all death, needs other means of understanding: "I devoted long hours to Steiner meditation and did my best to draw close to the dead. I had very strong feelings about this and could no longer neglect the possibility of communicating with them. My postulate was that there was a core of the eternal in every human being. Had this been a mental or logical problem I would have dealt logically with it. However, it was no such thing. What I had to deal with was a life-long intimation" (438-439). He acquires a very strong inner composure that has not previously been available to him. He says that "my mind appeared to become more stable. For one thing I seemed to be recovering an independent and individual connection with the creation, the whole hierarchy of being" (441). Leaving his luxury hotel in Madrid, where he had initially gone to do some commercial writing on the persuasion of his friend Thaxter, he rents a room in an obscure pension, and intensifies his meditations and exchanges with the soul. He is successful in making himself virtually impervious to the world surrounding him.

But Cantabile discovers him there also. And with him comes what he represents--the mad, materialistic world, the talk of money, threats. "These last weeks I had been far from the world," records Citrine, "beholding it from a considerable altitude and rather strangely. This white-nosed, ultranervous, over-reaching, gale-force Cantabile had brought me back, one hundred percent" (455). Cantabile tells him that a movie has been made from the film-script that Citrine and Humboldt had once written in collaboration. Expecting to gain a large amount of money himself, Cantabile persuades Citrine to sue the film producers and demand compensation. Humboldt had left behind sealed documents, now in possession of Citrine, to prove that the script had been written by them. As mentioned above, Humboldt had also left behind another plot for a film that can now bring a lot of money to Citrine. Disturbed in his quiet life full of meditation, Citrine at first flatly refuses to involve himself in money-making programs again, but reminded of Humboldt's old uncle Waldemar who needs money, he agrees to go to Paris with Cantabile to claim money from the film producers. Humboldt, in his last letter to Citrine mentioned above, had asked him to take care of his uncle.

Citrine's behaviour with Cantabile during these operations is very calm and full of self-assurance which is indeed a sign that he has already been able to some extent to rise above the worldly conditions while remaining and doing his duty in the world. All efforts of Cantabile to harrass him through threats as before are of no avail now.

This change in Citrine parallels Steiner's predictions about the result of meditation upon an individual's behaviour. Steiner writes that at the awakening of the higher being in man, "In his whole being, he will grow calmer; he will attain firm assurance in all his actions. . . . He will begin no longer to get angry at things which formerly angered him; countless things which he formerly feared cease to alarm him."[11]

According to Steiner, the real awareness of the higher being starts after this stage. What Citrine has achieved till now is the prerequisite inner calmness and dissociation or detachment from the world of Appearances, a relatively unshakable faith in a higher world to be realized through concentration and faith, and step by step esoteric exercizes as suggested by Steiner, Citrine has been trying to meditate and do these exercizes, but could not achieve results because of his persisting attachments at that time with the world, because he did not have the prerequisite inner peace. As he admitted: "I hadn't done my homework. . . . I was just about to go into it seriously. . . ." (391).

At the end of the novel we see Citrine with Humboldt's uncle Waldemar in New York. They have had the coffins of Humboldt and his mother reburied side by side. Waldemar, with the new money paid by film producers to Citrine as compensation for the illegal use of the

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[11]R. Steiner, pp. 19-20.

script written by Citrine and Humboldt, can afford a better, more comfortable life as his nephew Humboldt had wanted. Citrine himself gets rid of all debts and obligations and is ready to devote himself fully to matters of the soul. Humboldt himself died a pauper and a failure in his ambitions. But his gift, the legacy in the form of the precious film-scripts, has made it possible for Citrine to free himself from his earthly bonds and rise above them to make contact with the immortal spirit of life, with the souls of his dear dead. Humboldt's gift thus enables him to transcend the world he was otherwise so committed to.

In an essay on Saul Bellow, R. Chase wrote: "What is so far chiefly missing in Bellow's writing is an account of what his heroes want to be free from."[12] The answer, I believe, lies in Citrine's final resolve--to rise above the finite values of the world, to break the Moha's hold on his existence. Bellow himself said in a published speech: "In our world it seems that as soon as a clear need appears it is met falsely. It becomes a new occasion for exploitation. . . . This is how the modern world meets the deepest of human needs--by fraud, demagogy, opportunism and profiteering."[13] Citrine's world, as we have seen, is full of people who exploit others through such practices. Citrine is unable to hate them, but he does want to be free of them, of their world, free from attachment to restricted and

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[12]R. Chase, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow," Commentary, 27 (April 1959), 330.

[13]Saul Bellow, "A Matter of the Soul," Opera News (January 11, 1975), p. 29.

finite values of the world. He is determined to seek a chance of relating to infinite and permanent values through spiritual training.

CONCLUSION

The three novels discussed in this thesis show the individual trying to re-establish his links with society, nature and the spiritual world. These three novels are also linked with one another by a few recurring motifs that have been strongly suggested but not dwelt upon in detail--they include a strong condemnation of the growing materialism of modern society and its destructive effect on aesthetic, humanistic and spiritual values; man's pre-occupation with the question of death, seen as threatening challenge in the first two novels and as a mystery that inspires serious metaphysical quest in the last novel; the role of intellect in man's attempt to solve the riddle of life, its materialistic as well as spiritual problems. All these motifs combine to help Bellow's heroes find their place in the universe they inhabit. "The history of our spiritual life," says Steiner, "is a continuous seeking after union between ourselves and the world. Religion, Art and Science follow, one and all, this goal."[1]

Each of Bellow's heroes whom we have studied here makes this search by himself, employing these means directly or indirectly. The important point is that the world that surrounds each of them does not change. It is the individual and his attitude towards it that has to undergo a change in order that the individual may relate with

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[1] R. Steiner, The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity (New York: Anthroposophic Press Publishers, 1922), p. 16.

the external phenomena. The primitive man, as described by Barfield, saw the life principle or the being represented both in himself and the phenomena around him; now no such awareness exists; the task of creating a conscious relationship with the external phenomena lies with the individual himself. While scientific thought first made man conscious of his separation from the phenomena, it also provided him with an ability to recreate his relationship with the phenomena through what Steiner calls Thought and what Barfield calls Imagination. Steiner states clearly that "Only when we have transformed the world-content into our thought-content do we recapture the connection which we had ourselves broken off."[2]

Joseph of Dangling Man moves from his hatred of and isolation from society to the realization of the absolute necessity of relating with the society unmindful of its imperfections and shortcomings. His decision is not forced upon him from outside. It is an inner necessity that makes him take the step of joining the army at the end of the novel. Steiner's quotation from a letter of Spinoza refutes the opinion held by many critics about Joseph's joining the army. Spinoza writes: "'I call a thing free which exists and acts from the pure necessity of its nature, and I call that unfree, of which the being and action are precisely and fixedly determined by something else!"[3] It is in the very nature of man to want to re-establish his broken links with the outward reality. Joseph's is only the first step. The

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[2]R. Steiner, The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity, p. 16.

[3]Ibid., p. 3.

next, and the one whose fruit we are made to see too, is taken by Henderson; he is also responding to his inner voice that repeatedly says "I want, I want." Henderson does learn to make the 'world-content' his 'thought-content', and he thus successfully reconstructs his connection with nature.

Finally, Citrine's attempt is to make search into the world of the spirit. The call to do so again comes from his inner self. Not only does he himself feel that death is not the end of life, but his friend Humboldt too gave him a strong hint of the existence of a spiritual world. Humboldt ended the last letter he ever wrote to Citrine with: "Last of all--remember: we are not natural beings but supernatural beings" (347). Citrine thus must try to re-establish his connection with the spiritual world from where he might originally have come. It is for this that he wants to withdraw from the world of matter and material.

The central point thus is the individual's initiative, caused by an inner necessity, to recapture his connection with a reality outside himself. This inner necessity calls for an end to one's alienation, and when an individual obeys this necessity, it is for the fulfilment of his whole being. Therefore it is a source of freedom rather than a loss of freedom. Bellow's heroes are struggling for the freedom that is found only in re-establishing one's ties with the reality outside oneself.

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